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JACK SCUDAMORE'S DAUGHTER

A Domestic Story

BY

FOLKESTONE WILLIAMS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. III

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE TURRET CHAMBER . . .	1
II. AN ATTACHE'S HOLIDAY . . .	29
III. BROTHER BASILIUS . . .	52
IV. REVELATIONS OF THE CONFESSIONAL .	84
V. MONSEIGNEUR	115
VI. IN THE CONVENT PARLOUR . . .	136
VII. A NEW ST. PETER	159
VIII. JACK SOUDAMORE IN CLOVER . .	181
IX. BURGLARY	212
X. A RAINBOW IN THE SKY . . .	236
XI. LOVE'S DIPLOMACY	272
XII. POETICAL JUSTICE—WITH A VENGEANCE!	301

JACK SCUDAMORE'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE TURRET CHAMBER.

It was a clear spring day; the air keen but bright; an invigorating breeze played among the branches partly covered with young foliage, and swept over the tender green blades of the autumn-sown crops. The primroses were displaying their pale blossoms in innumerable groups upon the banks, where less conspicuously the violet held up its delicate petals amidst the thickening herbage. There was a continuous twittering in the hedgerows, and a restless flying backwards and forwards, and whirling in crowds, of sparrows and finches.

In the fields the farmer and his men were busy breaking-up last year's pasture with the plough, or flinging seed over the prepared soil; while flights of noisy rooks were wheeling overhead, descending on the freshly-opened furrow, or anticipating the advance of the crushing harrow, to snatch at the scattered grain.

The roads were every now and then enveloped in dust, that swept over its dry surface like a cloud, or eddied and circled in nooks and corners till a sharper gust came howling through the tall trees, and swept the accumulations in a blinding drift along the highway, over the hedges, and spreading far and wide along the surface of the cultivated lands.

The wagoner marched sturdily before his team, with his stubbly chin deep in a worsted comforter, his cap fixed low down on his brows, the peak over his left ear; while his legs, encased in thick leather gaiters and heavy ankle-boots, seemed to defy both dust and wind; but his arm was raised to protect his face as a violent blast drove before

it the pitiless cloud of sharp particles that would otherwise have invaded his eyes and ears.

Those who rode in the market carts and wagons took special care to turn their backs to the wind; an example followed by every pedestrian, but only when the dust appeared most troublesome,—an inconvenience, however, which no one seemed particularly to care for, the brightness of the day and the bracingness of the air seeming to exhilarate all who were able to enjoy them.

A stout gentleman, on as stout a cob, was seen slowly descending the hill on the road to Porchester. Except that the collar of his top-coat was up, he had made no provision against the intermittent fury of the gale. Possibly this was owing to the fact that he was travelling in the same direction. But that weather-tanned face evidently cared as little for a stiffish breeze as any ancient mariner experienced in cyclones and tornadoes. His healthy complexion laughed at wind and frost. Every body knew him. Hearty greetings from gentle and simple marked his pro-

.

gress. Even the blinding dust could not prevent the farmer's wife, going to market with her dairy produce, turning round in her cart to have a good look at those well-known features.

"How do, Squire?" was her hearty exclamation; "I be main glad to see thee. Lunnon ain't spiled thee a bit."

"How do, dame?" was the cheery response. "How's all at home?"

"Charming, Squire, thank ye kindly; and," she added, with her broad face glowing with pleasure, "cheese be riz tuppence a stone!"

"There goes honest Jack Scudamore!" cried an old shepherd, as he stood bare-headed looking after the horseman; "a chap o' the right sort, if there ever were one."

"That be he," added another farm-labourer with equal heartiness. "There be few o' the gentry as comes up to he."

On rode the Squire, nodding to and hailing as pleasantly every one who recognised him. But though his smile seemed as cordial as ever, his

heart was by no means so light as his many well-wishers desired it to be. For the first time in his life he was dissatisfied. The consciousness that he could no longer enjoy the recreations that had ministered so largely to his happiness, made him discontented. He attributed it to the loss of his daughter's society; and as the compensation he had looked for—the seeing her receive the homage of the county—had not been afforded him, he could no longer restrain his desire to behold her surrounded by the dignities belonging to her elevated position.

The great castle stood out in all its princely magnificence in the landscape before him, and far and wide spread the woods and parks of the ducal estate. His eyes brightened, and his ruddy face glowed with pride. He began to feel a sensible satisfaction that his “lass” was mistress of all that solid grandeur and consideration.

He sighed again as he remembered the charm she used to give to his daily life; the radiant smile, the silvery laugh, the loving attentions that

made her presence a perpetual joy. Though he kept assuring himself that his darling Fanny was a duchess, that she was one of the very greatest ladies in the land, and the queen of the county, the conviction forced itself most unpleasantly upon him that her greatness had taken her out of his reach.

It was in vain that he tried to find content in the knowledge that she was the wife of the play-fellow of his boyhood—the kindest, the truest friend he had ever known—and that he had done the right thing in gratifying the Duke's wish to be his son-in-law; a misgiving would intrude into his honest mind that it was exactly the right thing for *him*.

This gratification of his friend had beggared himself, stripped him of every thing that had rendered life enjoyable, caused him to lose all the old interest in the old pursuits; and he now awoke to the consciousness that the dear companionship he had so readily surrendered had been the savour that had given such wonderful zest to his existence.

Then, too, there was a terrible uncertainty about this grand marriage having made the lass happy. The last time he had seen her, her beautiful face wore quite a different expression to what he had been used to see. The Duke had borne the character of an attentive husband, and there could be no question of his being kind to Jack Scudamore's daughter. Still the dear girl might have preferred a younger husband, as was very natural. Then what a brute he must have been to have allowed her to marry the Duke!

He was disappointed, too, at her not having called or sent to him since his return to Delamere Court. But perhaps he thought it was the etiquette for him to make the first visit. He was only Jack Scudamore, she the Duchess of Porchester. Of course he ought to pay proper respect to her grace. Besides, there was that sudden departure from town. The Duke was out of order; might still be ill. It was his bounden duty to call to inquire after the health of his son-in-law.

With these reflections the much-troubled fox-hunter jogged on, on the back of his stout sure-footed steed. While he is proceeding to his destination, I will carry the reader in advance, and take him to that imposing edifice still in the distance. Not at first to any of the ordinary reception-rooms, or in that still more magnificently furnished portion called the state apartments, but far away to a distant and unfrequented wing, up flights of tortuous steps, through gloomy corridors and musty lumber-rooms, till a cork-screw stone stair led to another dark passage, at the end of which was a door.

Having opened this, we enter a dark chamber with a carved ceiling and one narrow window, very narrow and far out of reach. There is a fire-place with a fire burning, but the grate is enclosed in a high brass screen. The floor is covered with some thick elastic substance, and so are the walls to a height of five or six feet. The furniture is very simple for a ducal residence.

On an easy-chair nearest the light sits a

powerfully-built man in the prime of life, of gentlemanly appearance, reading, but occasionally raising his eyes with a somewhat severe scrutiny to a strange figure reclining on a small pallet within a few feet of him. He is unquestionably an old man, rather under the middle size, and he wears a most singular costume, carpet-slippers, and strong coarse trousers. But the most remarkable garment is the jacket; it seemed made of some such material as stout bed-ticking, and in a fashion very ill adapted to insure the comfort of the wearer.

The face of this little old man so strangely appavelled would at once arrest attention. The restless eyes, with a vacant stare fixed upon the reader, the childish simper playing about the thick lips, the flabby colourless cheeks, heavy brows, and projecting jaw, told their own terrible tale—imbecility and mania.

In that padded room, with its secure window and grate, confined in a strait-waistcoat, stared, simpered, and jibbered all that was mortal of one

of the most influential statesmen of his age. The over-tasked brain had suddenly given way, and after a severe conflict with a frightful disease, all that remained of the descendant of one of the younger sons of the heroic Edward the Third—all that was left of his grace Edward, Plantagenet, Courtenay, De L'Isle, Duke of Porchester, Marquis of Delamere, and Baron of Courtenay and De L'Isle—was an idiot and a maniac.

The keeper read on, his stern eye in a moment quelling the unnatural noise in which his patient occasionally indulged, till the sound made by ascending footsteps attracting his attention, he put aside his book, and unlocked the door.

The Duchess of Porchester entered noiselessly. She was dressed in a bright blue robe, with a chain of amber beads suspended from her neck. She had been told that the patient preferred gay colours, and he had once played with the necklace. She gave a hasty anxious glance towards the pallet-bed, then looked inquiringly into the face that confronted her. A shake of the head

was her reply, as the door was cautiously closed and fastened.

"No improvement, Doctor?" was murmured mournfully.

"Not the slightest, Duchess."

The patient glanced vacantly from one to the other; stared, simpered, and gibbered, but did not attempt to move. The lady sighed heavily.

"God's will be done!" she exclaimed. "I have so much faith in your experience, Doctor, I cannot give up all hope. I gratefully appreciate your kindness in so readily answering my appeal to exercise all your skill in his behalf, with the hope of preventing the dreadful secret becoming known; and I will have patience, Doctor,—I will have patience—and faith."

"All that knowledge of the malady can do for my interesting patient shall be done, Madam, rest assured."

"Thanks. Now go and take your walk. I have come to relieve guard, you know."

The physician saw a sad faint smile play round

the beautiful mouth. His heart was touched by her devotion to her husband. Used as he had been to human misery in its most terrible forms, the sorrow impressed on that lovely face was to him far more difficult to look upon. He ardently wished to be able to afford her consolation; but as yet the case gave no promise of amelioration, much less of cure.

It seemed a regular arrangement. The Doctor, after a few precautionary words, took his hat and gloves from a table in a recess, and left the room, locking the door on the outside. The Duchess, carrying a little basket, drew a chair and sat close to the pallet; then taking out some sweetmeats, she placed one of them in the mouth of the patient. He was evidently used to such attentions, for he simpered with a childish sense of gratification.

"You will be good, then, if your poor wife brings you such nice things?" she asked, as tenderly as if to a fractious infant. "It is naughty to be violent, and try to hurt yourself,—very naughty, and frightens your darling Fanny, who

is so anxious that you should get well. Then dear papa can come and see you, or we could go to him, which would please him more.

"Dear papa!" was added in a trembling undertone; "if he were to know the dreadful state to which his best friend is reduced, it would kill him. He mustn't know it. Nobody must know it.

"Here's another!"

She placed a second *bon-bon* in the mouth that had gaped for more with just sufficient of an animal instinct to appreciate the dainty.

"I shall tell the Doctor, when he comes back, that you've been very good. Pray don't repeat that horrid noise. It makes me shudder."

The patient was indulging in the performance which the Doctor's stern glance had restrained.

"Here, there are plenty more."

The sweetmeats were crammed into the open mouth, as if to stop the disagreeable sounds that were being emitted.

"Come, sit up; it will be more comfortable for you."

She helped him to sit upright, then smiled into the idiotic face, as though to cheer him into good humour.

"Now do be good, and I will do every thing likely to make you well.

"He doesn't know what I say," she added, sinking her voice; "he doesn't even know who it is who is taking such care of him. O that terrible noise!"

The patient was whining like a dog, and shrugging his shoulders very pitifully, while tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Something hurts you," she cried. "Those straps are too tight. I will loose them a little. It cannot be necessary to put him to pain."

Her fingers were quickly at the tight fastenings of the strait-waistcoat, and by tugging at them perseveringly, she contrived to release the limbs from the strain upon them, which had hitherto prevented free exercise of the muscles.

"Ah, that is better, isn't it? And you'll be so good now, won't you?"

She sat close to him on the bed, and seemed inclined to pet him more than ever. In answer, he stretched out his arms and laughed.

The Duchess suddenly drew back to her chair with a scared look. The laugh was not human,—it was like that of a caged hyæna. More horrible still, the look with which it was accompanied was quite as savage. Too late she saw her imprudence, and her heart sunk within her.

Presently the maniac made a spring in the direction of the door. When he found that the lock would not turn, he seized the handle with both hands, and shook the door with all his force. Finding it resist his utmost efforts, he turned round, livid with rage, and spying his frightened companion, with a terrific yell he bounded towards her.

“Don’t, Edward; you hurt me!”

The piteous cry excited no pity. He had seized her by the bright necklace that he had been permitted to play with, then dragged her into the centre of the chamber. She fell half-strangled, he

knocking on her, knocking her head against the floor, gibbering and gnashing and howling, till the fastening broke, and the beads were scattered about the room.

She had made no resistance, she had not attempted to call for help—nothing had escaped her lips but the remonstrance just mentioned. Suddenly she uttered a thrilling scream. She felt the madman's teeth meet in her flesh.

Scarcely had the cry of anguish escaped her, when a strong arm seized her assailant by the neck, and hurled him violently against the wall. Before he could recover from the shock, the fastenings of the strait-waistcoat were secured, and the maniac thrown upon his pallet.

The Doctor now turned to the Duchess. She lay pale as death, but conscious. He assisted her to rise, and noticed that blood was issuing from her dress.

It was while in this condition, her heart beating wildly, her brain confused by terror, that her maid came to announce her father's arrival.

Jack Scudamore stood before one of the two fires that warmed the Long Gallery at each end. He had been left here by the attentive and rather stately groom of the chambers. Indeed, all the servants he had met had vied with each other in their attentions to him. There could be no question that they were glad to see the father of their mistress, and were specially glad to treat him as an honoured guest; nevertheless, he noticed an unusual solemnity in their reception.

He had been there often, and was well known to most of them; but he had always been on rather an easy footing with the dignified old steward—had been permitted to joke with the solemn butler—had even been favoured with the latest London gossip by the fashionable-looking valet. Now, though they seemed inclined to be more civil than ever, it was with a seriousness of manner that left the jocose observations he had been in the habit of making, stifled in his throat.

“All owing to that confounded etiquette!” thought the Squire; “these fellows know that I

am now the Duke's father-in-law, and insist on treating me as a great man."

He was mistaken. The Duchess had taken extraordinary precautions to prevent a knowledge of the unhappy state of the Duke becoming known; but though all very willingly appeared ignorant, the terrible fact was as well known to the principal domestics as to herself. They were equally anxious to prevent its further diffusion, and lent their ready aid to their mistress's plans for insuring secrecy.

They accepted the celebrated mad-doctor as a physician of eminence, to whose exclusive care the Duke's case had been intrusted, and seemed perfectly content with his selection of the turret-chamber for the invalid, on account of the salubrity of the air at that elevation, and the perfect quiet insured by its retired position. They too were sensible of the wife-like devotion of the youthful Duchess—would have wondered at, as much as they commended it, had they not remembered that she was Jack Scudamore's daughter.

There was a heavy weight upon their spirits, which no doubt sensibly affected their demeanour, when they presented themselves before the Squire. Profound was their sympathy, but they did not dare to show it too openly. So the honoured visitor passed on without venturing to question any of them, and was ushered into the Long Gallery under the mistaken impression I have mentioned.

He tried to amuse himself by looking at the pictures. He had seen them often, but now he regarded them with a new interest—at least the family portraits. They were his connections. He put his hands in his pockets, and strode from one to the other of his new kinsmen, with sensible satisfaction. Yes, with all these dukes, and marquises, and barons, he could claim relationship.

Presently he started back a pace or two with an exclamation of surprise. He gazed on a full-length of a very beautiful lady, dressed with extraordinary magnificence—a youthful empress in her state robes could scarcely have been more richly apparelled.

"MY LASS!" cried honest Jack Scudamore, his breath almost taken away by the sudden surprise, and his face glowing with excessive pride and pleasure. "By Jove, she's an Eclipse! Distances them all! There isn't one of these grand ladies that comes within a dozen lengths of her!"

"Ah, this was the picture done at Paris, that she wrote to me about. By George, how like her dear mother at the same age! Her lovely face! Her noble figure! My darling, beautiful Fanny!—there isn't a woman living worthy to come on the same course with you!"

Tears trembled on his eyelashes; he brushed them off with the back of the hand that held his heavy hunting-whip, and turned away. Then he started more violently than before, let the whip drop, and stared as though unexpectedly confronted by a ghost.

"Papa!" cried a tender voice.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the astonished Squire; "can it be possible! What on earth can be the matter with my lass to have changed

her so completely ? Your darling face is as white as a tombstone ! Your cherry lips have almost as little colour ! Has any one been ill-using you ! Are you ill ?”

“No, papa ; I’m only tired,” was the reply. “I have been obliged to sit up a good deal—the Duke does not like me to be out of his room. I have been very anxious and troubled about him—and—and—perhaps want a little refreshing exercise—that’s all, dear papa.”

“Oh !” cried the old man, his clenched fist relaxing, and the fierce expression that had come into his eyes giving way to one of compassion ; “a good daughter makes a good wife. You’ve been trying to do credit to your bringing-up ; and doing a good deal too much, I can see. But I’m glad it’s no worse. By George, I am !”

He threw his arm round her neck, kissed her forehead, and pressed her in an affectionate embrace.

“How dreadfully fast your heart beats, my dear child !” he presently cried, as if he had discovered a fresh source of alarm.

"The pleasure of seeing *you*, dear papa," was murmured in reply.

"Oh! then, you haven't forgotten your fond old dad, Fanny, eh?" was the credulous and much-gratified father's rejoinder. "That's as it should be, and the knowledge of it repays me for—But how's the Duke? I was staying at Sir Harry's hunting lodge; so I thought I'd ride over to the Castle, and inquire after his grace."

"Thank you, papa. He is quite as well as can be expected. But the doctor will not permit him to see any one at present, and he is so very impatient when I'm away, that I shall be obliged to hurry back."

The Squire's face looked a little disturbed at this information. He was any thing but disposed to shorten his interview. His darling was in his arms, and he had waited very long for that happiness.

"But I intend, dear papa, to pay you a long visit as soon as I can."

The disturbed countenance brightened up.

"By Jove, shan't I be glad to have you back again, my lass; if it's only for a week! You see I've been rather dull. I'm a stupid old fool, and ought not to have missed you so much. But when you can come back to the dear old place, Fanny, I'll show them that Jack Scudamore can go across country yet. By George, I will! We'll go to the meet together, as of old. If I could have but one glorious run, with you leading the way, as you used to do, my pet—by the Lord Harry, I think I should remain content for the remainder of my life."

"Only wait a little, papa; and then it shall be just as you wish."

"Of course, I'll wait, Fanny. I'm really quite cut up about the dear Duke. He and I, you know, have been such cronies. But as he never had much of an illness before, I don't see why he shouldn't get over this with proper care; and that I'm sure he has."

"Yes, papa!"

"I intended selling the brood-mares; but there's

one I can't make up my mind to part with. Do you remember Slyboots?"

She looked inquiringly into his now animated face.

"Surely you haven't forgotten Slyboots, my lass? The gray filly on which you raced me for a gold watch across the hundred-acre field to the white gate leading into the park."

A faint smile played for a moment over her pallid features.

"Ah! I thought you couldn't forget that, Fanny. I was on Jupiter, and pulled him in, because I wanted you to win; but I shall never forget my surprise when I beheld you go slap at the gate, as if it were a bulrush—the next blessed minute saw your habit flying above the top-rail, and heard your merry laugh as the filly landed you safe on the other side."

The Duchess was beginning to feel faint, and became afraid that she could not play out this painful deception if the conversation continued much longer.

"You will have some refreshment, dear papa, after your ride," she said. "I am very sorry that I am obliged to leave you. Another time we will have luncheon together; or, better still, you shall come to the Castle, and stay as long as you like."

She kissed him with all her accustomed tenderness, intending to withdraw; but the old man pressed her closer to his heart. In doing so, he laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder. It gave her exquisite pain; but, with a sublime courage, she did not wince. A thin dress only concealed the adhesive-plaster that had been hastily placed over the recent wound.

She knew that had she betrayed any sense of pain, her father's suspicions would have been excited, and her spirit could not but break down under his anxious questions. She therefore smiled in his loving face, as if delighted with this demonstration of his affection.

"I will ride back to Sir Harry, my dear," he replied quite cheerfully, and stooped to pick up

his whip. "I suppose I may take him your compliments; nothing against etiquette in that, is there?"

"Remember me to all your friends, papa!"

He began to draw-on his riding-gloves.

"Do you remember, years and years ago, Fanny my pet," he added, and his ruddy face seemed again all of a glow with pleasure, "when you were quite a little thing in frock and trousers, one day after you had come in with the dessert, I got you to stand on the table, and sing 'Bright chanticleer' to my guests; and they were all so delighted that they elected you a member of the hunt on the spot, though you then only rode a pony? Ah, those were joyous times. But good-by, my lass," he added, evidently with a kind of desperation holding out his hand; "please God, when my poor friend gets well, we'll see those good old times come back."

His daughter threw herself into his arms, and kissed him very lovingly.

"Good-by, papa!" was all she could say.

"And I suppose I may give pleasant messages from you to the people at home. Dawkins, you know, and Mrs. Lavender, and Dick Wilcox, and the rest of them. I know that the poor souls would be charmed with an affectionate remembrance from the great Duchess."

"Say any thing you like, papa; say every thing that's most kind. Tell them I often think of them; and when I see them again, I will prove to all that they have never been forgotten."

"That's right, my lass; and God bless you. Never forget old friends, however humble."

Again they interchanged the good old-fashioned parting benediction; and the Squire left the Long Gallery, and proceeded in the direction of the grand staircase.

The Duchess strained her eyes after his retreating figure. Gladly would she have accompanied him to the entrance; very gladly have taken his last caress when he should be in the saddle; but her strength had already been taxed too much; she could not have walked with him a

dozen paces. She heard him cheerfully accost the groom of the chambers as he descended to the hall; then she tottered to the nearest chair, and, flinging her arms on the back, bowed her beautiful head, and burst into a torrent of tears.

This appeared to relieve her overcharged heart. The intense excitement under which she had been suffering seemed to abate. She wiped her eyes, and sighed heavily once or twice; then rose to her feet with the intention of returning to her duties, thankful that she had not been disturbed; comforted, too, with the conviction that no one had witnessed her emotion. The Duchess shuddered from head to foot, but resolutely bent her steps towards the turret-chamber.

CHAPTER II.

AN ATTACHE'S HOLIDAY.

MONTH after month passed by, and found Arthur Calverley still making fruitless endeavours to discover Geraldine's retreat. There was no "private-inquiry office" at this period; espionage was not a profession, as it is now; nevertheless, persons were to be found ready to trace any thing, from a missing heir to a lost lapdog; and they were employed by a clever solicitor, who had achieved a reputation in such discoveries.

But the months had accumulated into a year without producing any result. Messengers had been sent to Ireland to find Dillon. Not only was the neighbourhood of Maurice Court carefully explored, but every place in the island, where the

worthy fellow was known to have friends. But he had totally disappeared; no one knew where.

As the presumption was that he had accompanied the fugitives, advertisements were published in the English and Irish papers, announcing "something to his advantage," and offering a handsome reward for information as to his whereabouts. But poor Dillon never was heard of; and a suspicion began to be entertained among his friends that he had been secretly murdered, at the instigation of the claimant of the Maurice-Court Estate, or his coadjutor,—the man he had dispossessed, now acting as his agent for the property,—who was known to be continually boasting in his drunken excesses "how nately he had done the thrick, and had his revenge into the bargain."

As four persons had disappeared, each easily to be identified—the dowager, the brother and sister, and the agent—Mr. Hawksley, of Thavies Inn, the clever lawyer employed by Captain Calverley, continued to assure his client that they must turn up sooner or later; yet neither of them

could be traced ; moreover, no one could be met with who had seen or heard of them since their mysterious departure from Rose Lawn.

The affair was much discussed in society, and Arthur was warmly congratulated by his well-married relations on his fortunate escape. The bar-sinister was evidently a special bugbear to the flourishing Calverleys, and they were rather severe in their remarks on the poor old countess for having made so much of her nephew's "love-children." The bishop's widow even went so far as to condemn it as a gross impropriety ; but her ladyship continuing her countenance of them, after the exposure, was an unpardonable outrage.

Somehow or other, the member for Delamere received his congratulations in a spirit the reverse of what his indignant kindred had expected to see. The pompous Lord Madras had talked to him very seriously on the necessity of maintaining the honour of their illustrious family ; in an equally fussy manner little Lord Calverley preached to him on the same text. His lordship was pleased

to wonder how he could have let the great heiress slip through his fingers, while he was wasting his great natural capabilities on "a wretched pauper."

The Captain was either very perverse, or an extremely degenerate Calverley; for immediately after these interviews he went to Thavies Inn, and directed Mr. Hawksley to increase the reward that had been offered for intelligence of his missing friends. Then, after earnestly urging him to stimulate his agents to further exertions, and to communicate the slightest favourable intelligence to him without a minute's loss of time, he proceeded on the journey he could no longer delay.

Captain Calverley commenced a new career as paid *attaché*, and his new home was the British Embassy at Brussels. Here his handsome person, gentlemanly manners, and intellectual accomplishments, soon won for him influential friends of both sexes. The only fault they could find with him was, they thought he was uncommonly reserved for a young cavalry officer in a crack regiment.

This, however, was rather a recommendation than otherwise to his chief; and having gone through the drudgery of *précis*-writing, and copying despatches—a kind of diplomatic stone-breaking and oakum-picking, used as a labour-test for all volunteers for work at our principal foreign embassies—he was regarded as the most promising member of the staff. Indeed, he had been found an efficient substitute for the secretary, during an unavoidable absence from his post on “urgent private affairs.”

The new *attaché* appeared to be extremely fond of work; and the amount of it he got through, whenever there was a sudden pressure on the office, was a marvel to his less-industrious associates at the Embassy. Brussels was a very gay city, and they preferred enjoying its fashionable diversions to studying protocols, or writing ultimatums. They could not understand why Calverley, who was such a deuced good-looking fellow, should not care about going to balls, and operas, and concerts, and parties, and did not seem

at all struck by the pretty women who were there always to be met with.

Work as he would, Arthur always found time for reflection. On these occasions, his thoughts invariably travelled in one direction. Notwithstanding the good counsel he had received from his seniors, he would think that in losing Geraldine he had lost the brightest, the fairest, the best, ay and the noblest example of affectionate womanhood the world contained.

All the well-meant remonstrances and exhortations to which he had had to listen, had not in the slightest degree affected the overpowering feeling of sympathy and admiration that the knowledge of her undeserved misfortune had created. Her entire helplessness, her overwhelming disgrace, appealed to his truly gallant nature more powerfully even than the recollection of her youth, her beauty, her innocence, and the thousand inexpressible graces that accompanied them.

The pleasant retrospection would return again and again, when the pen had accomplished its pre-

scribed task. Little did the ambassador think that his promising *attaché* secretly gave himself up to the consideration of a subject far as the poles asunder from the foreign policy of his country. Little was that experienced diplomatist aware that instead of mastering the Russian complication, he was devoting his mind and heart to the disentangling of one a good deal nearer and dearer to him. That sagacious statesman could have fathomed a Metternich, or penetrated a Talleyrand; yet he could not see that his subordinate was helplessly, apparently hopelessly, in love.

So Arthur went on, at his leisure chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, unsuspected by his daily associates; going deliberately over the past, as if rather to find a lost clue through a labyrinth than to indulge in the gratifications of a lover's memory. He was conscious of a mystery in his delightful intimacy at Rose Lawn, that always suggested his boyish romance in the Abbey ruins. Over and over again the consideration of the one had glided into a remembrance of the other.

Then came recollections of things said or done at different times, that presented themselves to his mind as broken links of the same chain. He tried to remember the conversation he had overheard between the Mother-superior of the good nuns and her companion, on the morning of his departure from the Abbey—or rather her portion of it—and recal the equally strange dialogue, of which he had long subsequently been a forced auditor, between the stern sister of the same community and her unknown associate, and then piece the disjointed fragments together.

The result seemed only to increase his mystification. Suddenly he remembered the intelligent cicerone he had met in the Abbey ruins; and an idea struck him with the force of an inspiration. If any one was likely to help him to explain this mystery, it must be Dr. Petre. He had acknowledged his long acquaintance with the good sisters; and on this foundation the lover built his hopes of finding out what had baffled his powers of investigation.

He was aware that the Bishop of Melpotamos

was in Belgium, as he had lately read in a Brussels newspaper an account of his having been in retreat in one of the principal monasteries. He therefore came to a determination, and lost no time in following it out.

Having obtained leave of absence, he packed a valise, and in due time found himself in a railway-carriage that was leaving the Brussels station. In his compartment he had only two companions: one a dark-complexioned man of gentlemanly exterior, apparently a foreigner, whose attention was absorbed by the columns of the *Indépendance Belge*, which screened him from observation; the other had much the appearance of a thriving English farmer or grazier seeking a profitable investment in cattle.

Seeing a countryman who seemed perfectly disengaged, this person addressed himself to Captain Calverley almost as soon as they had quitted the Flemish capital.

"Not a bad country this, sir, to get a living in, I should think; though any thing but attractive,

it looks prosperous; the peasants appear as if they had money to spend."

"Yes," replied his compatriot courteously; "under its enlightened ruler the people enjoy a more than ordinary amount of material prosperity."

"What I thought, sir. I can always tell the best line of country for getting money."

"Indeed! Are beasts dear here?"

"Middling. An animal as has been well taught always commands his price."

The *attaché* was under the impression that it was good feeding, not teaching, that made the animal desirable; but he diplomatically held his tongue.

"I'm here on spec, sir."

"So I thought. I hope you will be successful."

"It's very difficult to meet with success in my line, sir. You can have no idea of the difficulty. The British public are always craving for novelty; and the worst of it is, novelty isn't always to be had. That brings me here, sir. I'm looking out for something new and striking."

The *attaché* could not quite comprehend what his fellow-traveller meant; but as he knew that he was not thoroughly up in breeding and fattening live stock, he took refuge in a commonplace exclamation.

“Oh, indeed!”

“I think I may say, and I do so with a good deal of professional pride, sir, that I have introduced more novelties to a discerning and discriminating British public than any other member of the profession.”

“Shorthorns or longhorns?” thought the Captain.

“It was I who brought forward the Piebald Phenomenon and the Pony Fortune-Teller. Myself, sir, trained the unrivalled Andalusian Mule, which was unique, sir. It could leap through blazing hoops, pick an orange out of a tub of water, find a card in a sack of grain, and play on the big drum sitting on a cane chair. He was quite unique, I assure you.”

“May I ask your name?” inquired Arthur, endeavouring to conceal his amusement.

"Oh yes, sir, certainly. I'm Jinks, sir—the Jinks, proprietor of Jinks's Imperial Circus. My son is going the Western Circuit with it now, sir. You don't happen to know if a pair of Aztec Warriors could be procured in this country? I don't mind a pretty high figure."

"I cannot say I ever heard of such persons," was the reply.

"You should have seen the pair I had. A tremendous success they were, sir. And a Bedouin Sheik, sir, as took almost as well. Then I had, at the same time, the Ethiopian Grimaldi—a real nigger, sir, who made the best clown I ever saw in the ring. When he came on, with his toes turned in, and his tongue out of his mouth, crying 'Here we are!' it was quite sensational, sir. But you should have heard him sing 'Hot cod-lings;' as I'm a living man, the spectators seemed ready to go into fits."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, sir; that identical nigger, sir, was absolutely earning a matter of sixteen bob a week!"

"Bless my heart!"

"They came to me in a lot, sir. The best spec I ever made in my life. A Yankee fellow, of whom I had bought a tame panther, offered them to me a bargain, if I would engage him in my troupe. I did, sir. I found him useful in the establishment, especially in disguises, and gave him good wages. He trained the whole of 'em, sir; and when I found that they doubled the receipts, I doubled his wages, and took him into my confidence. Will you believe it, sir, he proved a serpent? He induced my Aztec Warriors, my Bedouin Sheik, and my Ethiopian Grimaldi to run away with him, when their performances had been announced at the largest fair in that part of England. And what was more, sir, the miscreant carried off the receipts of the day's performance."

"What was his name?" asked, in excellent English, the gentleman behind the *Indépendance Belge*.

"He called himself Whittler, and boasted that he had been a captain in the United States."

"Hiram Whittler," said the stranger; "the most notorious swindler and horse-stealer in Texas. I heard that he had palmed himself upon an English lady travelling in the Southern States as guide and protector, and had subsequently crossed the Atlantic with her."

"That's him, sir. I was aware as they'd all left her, as the good lady believed, to return to their homes. The Aztecs and the Bedouin were traced to a ship that sailed from Liverpool; but a Yankee and a nigger have since been heard of at different places, a-swindling every body a'most; and the police suspects as they are the miscreants as imposed upon me."

Arthur remembered the attempt he had defeated to cheat the Squire, and felt assured of the identity of the parties.

"You are well quit of Mr. Hiram Whittler and his accomplices," observed the other, putting down his newspaper.

"But if I could get back the Aztec Warriors," said Mr. Jinks. "You don't happen to know

where I could pick up another pair, sir, do you?" he added pleadingly.

"Barnum could furnish you with a dozen," was the reply. "The Aztecs are a swindle. The two fellows were most likely Indians picked up by Hiram Whittler."

Mr. Jinks looked unhappy. He had lived under the impression that no man on earth could take him in; and he now learnt the full extent of the imposition of which he had been the dupe. He became reserved—so much so as scarcely to open his mouth till the train stopped at Ghent, when he got out, as he said that an equestrian troupe were performing in the neighbourhood; and he was going to them to see if he could discover any thing worth engaging for Jinks's Imperial Circus. The poor fellow made his parting salutations in a somewhat subdued tone.

Arthur found that his remaining companion was an American travelling for his pleasure; and as he proved to be an accomplished gentleman, they were soon engaged in an animated

conversation upon European and American politics.

At the next station other travellers entered the carriage; a fat lady, her equally fat daughter, and a priest who looked as if he could have outweighed both. The seniors immediately commenced such a chattering in French, that it was impossible for any one else to converse. So the American returned to his newspaper, and Arthur to his retrospections; while the stout young lady divided her attention between her dress, her ornaments, and her handsome *vis-à-vis*. He took no notice of her coquetry; and seeing that there was no probability of attracting the other gentleman who was behind his newspaper, she drew a small Rosary from her pocket, and began to repeat her prayers; as she moved the beads occasionally glancing out of the corners of her eyes at "the stupid insensible Englishman."

At last the train stopped, and Arthur got out of the carriage, after addressing a few parting words to his Transatlantic acquaintance, who was

going on to Ostend. He had arrived at the ancient city of Bruges.

Having secured his luggage, he was driven to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, where he obtained refreshment; then went out for a stroll. The air of decay that pervaded this mart of commercial activity in the Middle Ages, struck him forcibly. The few stragglers he met in the gloomy streets were either paupers or priests. The thriving merchants, the prosperous manufacturers, the busy artisans, who once crowded its thoroughfares, had totally disappeared. The principal architectural features of the place had survived its industry. Churches, monasteries, nunneries, hospitals, and other religious establishments, were in surprising numbers, considering the reduced population.

Many of the ancient dwelling-houses, that made the old city so picturesque, had been turned from their secular use; had become hives where drones had superseded the bees that had once stored much excellent honey there; and in and out stole habits of all kinds,—the mendicant and other re-

ligious orders that had gathered in these mediæval homes.

Bruges ought to have been a model fold, for the shepherds were more numerous than the sheep. It could scarce help being intensely Catholic, for all that was most thoroughly Roman prevailed in its innumerable places of worship. In truth, it might lay claim to almost as many relics, as many miracles, as many saints, as many shrines, as many splendours, and as many professed *religieuses* of both sexes, as the capital of the Pope's dominions. And it was quite as much a city of the dead. The commercial life had gone out of one as completely as the classical life had departed from the other.

Bruges was a minor Rome; but its Walloon inhabitants were not Romans. They were steeped to the lips in bigotry and prejudice, and as monkish in their religious notions as if they had never stirred out of a cloister.

Arthur passed all these evidences of superstition flourishing at the expense of industry and intelligence, with many a sigh for the good old times

of the Hanseatic League;—for if there was no great amount of refined civilisation in those days, there was no stagnation of the sources of human enlightenment and prosperity. It was pitiful to see so many evidences of social improvement devoted to purposes with which social elevation has nothing to do.

At last he came to a church splendidly lighted up. He entered, and found it gorgeously decorated. The pulpit was a miracle of carving; the altar-piece a masterpiece of Hans Memling; every where were such evidences of ecclesiastical luxury as are only produced during the grandest ceremonies of the Church. The place was crowded with a devout congregation, absorbed in what was going on,—gentle and simple, young and old, gazing and listening with wondering awe at the sights and sounds.

Presently he felt his frame thrill from head to foot. A choir of female voices sang from behind a screen, and he recognised the exquisite harmonies he had so often listened to in the Abbey ruins.

Entranced, as it were, by the delightful associations they suggested, he stood still till the singing had concluded.

He now pushed forward, for he was aware that something was going on near the altar, which was profusely decorated with flowers, that was attracting all eyes. At last he obtained a view of an elderly ecclesiastic in a mitre and very rich robe, with a female figure kneeling before him. He held a mass of soft golden hair in one hand, and in the other a pair of scissors. He was also addressing some questions to the kneeling figure, which were answered, but in too low a tone to reach his ear.

Again Arthur pressed forward to gain a better view; and an opening being made in the mass of people before him, he distinctly saw the features of the intended nun.

"Geraldine!" was shouted by him, in tones that must have penetrated every part of the church.

Its effect was electric on the kneeling figure.

She clasped her hands together, uttered a piercing shriek, and fell senseless at the feet of the bishop.

Arthur instinctively sprang forward; but instantly strong hands were laid upon him, and he was rudely pulled back. He tried to free himself; the idea of affording assistance to his lost love, now so strangely discovered, made him frantic. But cries of "Sacrilege!" arose from a hundred Walloon throats; a hundred fierce faces clustered round him menacingly; more strong arms seized him; and he found himself violently thrust, buffeted, and at last hurled out of a side door into a narrow street.

Here the storm of indignation burst out upon him with tenfold fury. Cries of "Heretic!" and other opprobrious names were hissed into his ears; groans, execrations, and curses were heaped upon his head in a barbarous patois; they clustered around him like wolves mad with hunger, their coarse features distorted with hate and rage into the likeness of demons.

They struck at him with hands and sticks;

they hurled at him every missile that came within their reach, each exciting the other by barbarous appeals to vengeance.

"Down with the heretic!"

"Away with the accursed Englishman!"

"To hell with the hated of God and the Blessed Virgin!"

"He has insulted our faith!"

"He has outraged our holy priests!"

"He has desecrated our most sacred church!"

"Strike! strike!"

"Kill! kill!"

Arthur made strenuous efforts to defend himself. With his back to a door he struck out right and left at his cowardly assailants, and sent a dozen of them screaming into the narrow road. But on they rushed again in greater numbers and with additional ferocity, with sticks and stones, at the one defenceless man.

The Captain had charged the batteries of the Ameers of Scinde, he had cut his way through a host of Sikh cavalry, with far less danger than

existed in his present position. The mob of fanatics screaming around him were mad with religious hatred; and every time a blouse was sent head-over-heels among them by those straightforward blows, they yelled like savages, and rushed forward to annihilate him with their missiles.

The unequal conflict could not last long. Bruised from head to foot, his clothes in rags and covered with dirt, Arthur still struck out manfully; but just as he had sent another of his innumerable enemies howling into the background, the glitter of bright metal flashed momentarily in his eyes. His hands dropped, his brain became dizzy, and he sank on the steps weltering in his blood.

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER BASILIUS.

THERE was again great excitement throughout the parish of Delamere Parva. In truth there was quite a commotion. The parishioners were divided into two camps, that were undeniably hostile in their sentiments; and if there was not actual war between them now raging, there was more than a sufficiency of belligerent feeling to produce it.

The cause was the Vicar. As I have intimated, there existed a small but influential party in the village that entirely disapproved of his religious innovations. They could not be brought to understand his ecclesiological enthusiasm; they could not appreciate the Anglican Church of the Middle Ages. Some of them, indeed, went so far

in their crass ignorance as to vote the florid services in their beautiful new church a sham, and the hermit-saint to whom it had been dedicated a humbug; and when the master of the Grammar-School published a pamphlet, in which he proved, with a prodigious amount of learning, that no such person had ever lived in Delamere, nor any where else in the county, the hitherto comparatively quiet malcontents grew scandalously obstreperous in their opposition.

But then they were the friends of that "pig of a churchwarden;" and the Reverend Basil Plymmon ought not to have been surprised that they grunted against him in chorus with their leader. *He* was often facetious on this subject with the lean Curate—that is to say, the last he had engaged; for, somewhat to his mortification, all the preceding half-dozen had followed each other into the Romish communion.

It is just possible that had the reverend gentleman possessed a little prudence he might have maintained his position and his alterations in the

ritual; but his taste for mediæval practices grew with what it fed on. His predilections took more and more a monastic shape. At last he startled his admirers by announcing that he intended establishing a new religious order, to be called the Brothers of St. Hildebrand, and that the vicarage would henceforth be their first establishment.

Great was the commotion when, as Brother Basilius, the Vicar officiated in a dark serge frock, with its hood thrown back, displaying the top of his head shaved in a circular patch, a rope-girdle round his loins, and with naked legs and feet—the latter bound with sandals; accompanied by the lean Curate similarly fashioned, looking as unsubstantial as if he were the Vicar's shadow, especially where the calves of his legs ought to have been.

Some of the congregation who had come to pray, most certainly remained to scoff. The tonsured faces; the long bodies, supported apparently by narrow balustrades ending in a group of extremely vulgar-looking toes, appealed too strongly to their sense of the ludicrous,—with the young

men especially. Even the young ladies, who had assisted him so liberally with their time, their pocket-money, and their accomplishments, were not all proof against the manifest absurdity of this display.

Subsequently, when it became known that Brother Basilius had taken the vow of chastity, several neglected their religious duties; that is to say, they were no longer seen in their parish-church. If the entire truth must be told, they expressed their indignation at their pastor's proceedings in very strong language, joined the now fast-increasing opposition, and made themselves rather unamiably conspicuous by their denunciation of popish practices.

It was on the morning of a bleak January day that Brother Basilius, as just described, his hands clasped, his eyes fixed on the ground, his cowl drawn over his head, left the vicarage, accompanied by Brother Simplicius, as the lean curate chose to style himself, though his patronymic was Perkins,—and followed by his choir and acolytes, bearing censers and banners, singing the custom-

ary canticle,—and proceeded solemnly towards the principal entrance of the church. There was a crowd in front of that portion of the sacred edifice—a very irreverent crowd apparently from the observations that greeted the procession; but the leader, absorbed in his holy meditations, did not seem to hear, in fact he did not seem to see, till he came to the porch, and nearly ran his head against the closed doors.

Brother Basilius started back in the utmost astonishment: Brother Simplicius did the same. Tittering from the women and girls, and a loud laugh from the men and boys, much increased their confusion.

“How stupid it must have been of the verger!” thought the one.

“A shameful trick of some of the college-boys!” thought the other.

Brother Basilius knocked, but there was no response; Brother Simplicius knocked again, but the door did not move.

The one monk looked at the other with a face

of blank amazement, as a chorus of rustic mirth burst upon their outraged ears. But the necessity for immediate action was felt by both, especially in their naked legs and feet, which the frosty air made unpleasantly sensitive.

They were about to proceed to a side door, when the burly figure of Jacob Cobb, with a forced gravity expressed in his homely features, approached the superior, and placed a paper in his hand. Brother Basilius took the official-looking document from his pig of a churchwarden with an air of lofty pity. It was sealed with a mitre. He opened it, and read the contents. They announced his suspension from his duties as vicar of the parish of Delamere Parva, and prohibited his preaching within the limits of the diocese.

The Reverend Basil Plynymmon might possibly have experienced a feeling of regret that he had too severely tried the forbearance of his bishop—that is, if he had had a particle of good sense in his composition; but unfortunately this he did

not possess. His mind was shallow, and his heart shallower still. He was the dupe of an inordinate vanity, and had been petted into the conclusion that he was a special instrument selected by Providence to restore the Anglican church to its pristine purity and splendour.

He could not surrender this delusion. He was still supported by many powerful friends, and felt assured of their assistance in the great work he had hitherto carried on with such astonishing success. So he quietly put the document in his pocket, and without deigning to notice either the pig of a churchwarden or the grinning heathens who were enjoying his discomfiture, he loftily gave orders to return to "the monastery;" and, accompanied by the lean Curate shivering in every limb, and followed by the silent and puzzled choristers, led the way back, pursued by a storm of rustic jeers, till he reached the shelter of his own house.

It was astonishing with what ease this important revolution in Little Delamere appeared to

have been accomplished. An hour before, and "the apostle of Puseyism" was the autocrat of his parish; an hour later, and the most remote portion of his government knew that his rule was at an end.

And it was curious to observe how quietly consent to his dethronement was manifested. There was immediately a laying aside of emblems that had hitherto been worn with much ostentation, and with them a good deal of a peculiar phraseology they had adopted about the same time. Even the most fervid admirers knew that they could do nothing in his behalf. The struggle was over; and the knowledge that they could neither defend nor support their favourite, reconciled them to his defeat.

Brother Basilius believed that his influential friends would remain stanch to his cause; he especially relied upon his female supporters in this crisis; and after having, as he considered, well reflected on his line of action, he determined, without loss of time, to institute a personal canvas,

accompanied by Brother Simplicius. In pursuance of this resolution the two monks left their monastery. Very much to the surprise of both, though little more than an hour had elapsed since the neighbourhood had been crowded with "the heathen multitude," not a living creature was discernible. Brother Basilius felt humiliated. Could so little account have been made of him, he thought, in a place where he had laboured for so many years as the spiritual director of the population? His downfall had excited any thing but sympathy; but it having been accomplished, his enemies had thought it only worthy of ridicule, and had gone their several ways at once, as if it deserved no further attention.

He tried to console himself with the conviction that great spirits are invariably in advance of their generation; but the neglect, made conspicuous by the desertion of the principal street, mortified him extremely. He was prepared to meet weeks of hooting, and months of public opprobrium; he rather desired to be made a martyr of; he would

have felt quite proud of a good share of popular persecution: but the parish was as tranquil as at midnight. Nobody molested him. Even the windows where he had always seen admiring faces had the blinds drawn down.

At last he sees a human being. He is coming out of "the Cross Keys." It must be—it is absolutely the precentor. But as soon as the man caught a glimpse of Brother Basilius, he turned sharp down an alley, without touching his trencher cap, and was instantly out of sight! The Vicar began to experience a feeling closely resembling misanthropy. He had done every thing for that man, and he had always appeared so zealous and grateful. How base must he be!

Brother Simplicius had also his reflections, and they were as little agreeable as those of his superior. He had been made acquainted with the bishop's proceedings, and was not certain whether he would be permitted to retain his curacy. That troubled him much; but what troubled him more was the insufficiency of his defence against the

severity of the weather. He had always felt chilly in the winter, but never so cold about the lower extremities as he felt then. He did not think that he should continue a Brother of St. Hildebrand unless he could be permitted to wear warmer garments. He knew he should have the rheumatism. There was a chilblain on his heel as big as a half-crown, and, if the cold increased, there was the terrible probability of getting his toes frost-bitten.

Brother Simplicius was so far a good monk that he was not indisposed to mortify the flesh; that is, he could fast in moderation; he did not mind discipline with the cord very much; but he never could reconcile his mild spirit to rheumatism; he hated chilblains, and had a horror of frost-bite: so he presently came to the conclusion that he would speak to the very reverend father superior, on the first opportunity, about leaving the order.

The lady whom Brother Basilius resolved to call upon first was Miss Brabazon. Certainly she

had not been any thing like so zealous as other members of the female portion of his flock; indeed, she had more than once passed most unfavourable opinions on his Anglican restorations; but then he always found excuses for her. She had been strangely brought up; she liked being eccentric; moreover, was invariably liberal. He never could find it in his heart to quarrel with her, however great was the provocation she had frequently given him. And the wisdom of his forbearance struck him very forcibly as he pushed open the gate of Brabazon Lodge, and remembered the errand on which he had come.

"Now," thought he, "I shall have to endure an intolerable amount of stable-slang, and be invited to make profane bets against horses I never saw."

"Now," thought Brother Simplicius, more cheerfully, "I shall have an opportunity of warming my poor legs."

The door opened on the bell being rung, and the Vicar on entering could scarcely believe the

evidence of his senses. The maid who ushered him into the hall would at any other moment have attracted his attention by the peculiarity of her dress, because it had been carefully copied from an Etruscan vase; but nothing could exceed his surprise at beholding, in place of the objects of natural history he had always seen there, a collection of antique statues.

He was staring bewilderingly from one to the other, when a door opened, and his hostess made her appearance. She saluted him in Latin. Brother Simplicius opened his eyes very wide, and well he might, when he in turn received the same salutation. Brother Basilius opened his eyes quite as wide, and well he might. Instead of the jockey-cap and habit in which of late Miss Brabazon had usually received her visitors, her hair was dressed and decorated in a peculiar style, common to certain ladies living at Rome in the Augustan era, and her dress was an exact representation (with one exception) of their costume.

"You see, my friend," said the lady, address-

ing the Vicar in English, "I have ventured to precede you in the classical change I have more than once recommended for your adoption. I intend to revive the order of Vestal Virgins."

Brother Simplicius smiled as he recognised the *suffibulum*, an oblong piece of white cloth bordered with purple, worn on her head, and the *stola*, *infula*, and *vitta* of the habit of the classical nuns.

Brother Basilius smiled also, for he could not help seeing that his eccentric friend looked very well in that singular costume, although her nose was far from being as classical as her dress; but he wisely refrained from expressing his ideas on that point, or rather snub.

"The intention is certainly commendable in one point of view," he observed, not thinking it good policy to find fault: "if you could give a religious character to it; for instance, supplement to it the piety of the Middle Ages."

"A fig for the Middle Ages!" cried Miss Brazon indignantly; "a period of semi-barbarous superstition!"

Brother Basilius, smiling, shrugged his shoulders.

"But I mean to give my restoration of the order a religious character," she added. "Look here," and she advanced towards one of the statues. "Here you will find one of the prototypes of the personifications that are such conspicuous features in ultramontane Catholicism."

"Apollo!" cried the monks simultaneously, in profound surprise.

"The son of Zeus, who was the ruler of heaven," replied their companion; "the type of human perfectibility; the possessor of infinite grace; the god-like man, and man-like god."

Brother Basilius pretended to be amused; Brother Simplicius seemed startled.

"You see that group!" she exclaimed, pointing to a mother and son; "Aphrodite and Eros,—the Madonna and Bambino of a later age."

"O fie!" cried the Vicar; and assumed the affectation of being shocked. The thin Curate, notwithstanding that he would have preferred standing before a good fire, appeared interested.

"Here," she continued, pointing to a figure of the chaste huntress, "is the original of your virgin saints: Artemis is the prototype of them all; indeed possesses a far better claim to immaculate conception than the object of the last Romish dogma, because her birth was divine.

"I will not trouble you with minor plagiarisms equally obvious," she added, with a mischievous smile, pointing to a statue of Pan; "but here I beg leave to introduce you to the original of *the mediæval devil*."

Brother Basilius laughed outright, as if he regarded it as a very good joke. The mistress of Brabazon Lodge was constantly poking her fun at him in the same way. He was very much amused, or seemed to be; and, with great good humour, followed his eccentric friend into the parlour.

This room he found fitted up exactly like a chamber in Pompeii; the furniture, the decorations, were careful facsimiles. Brother Simplicius, who had been looking uncomfortable, cheered up immensely at the sight of a bright fire; and gladly

accepted a strange-looking seat, within a convenient distance of its welcome glow.

"Hail to my reverend friends!" cried the lady reclining upon a couch, the left arm resting upon a striped pillow, in the manner of a guest at a symposium; "a happy augury to have two flamines enter the house together. Like Socrates, I this morning sacrificed a cock to Æsculapius; I receive your coming as a token of the god's care,—for the soul's health insures that of the body. I invite you, holy men, loved of the gods, to proclaim your errand."

Brother Simplicius felt more astonished than ever. He looked around in an ecstasy,—for he was a scholar, and could appreciate what he observed; but the address he had just heard brought his surprise to a climax.

"What new vagary is this?" mentally inquired Brother Basilius; "if any thing, it is worse than the racing one."

He, however, prudently forbore from expressing his objections; and at once proceeded to open

his mission. After a brief, but somewhat prejudiced, relation of the proceedings against him of his diocesan, he stated that he had come to solicit her assistance to enable him to bring his case before the proper tribunal, that would at once force the Bishop to reinstate him in his clerical office.

"If you had followed my advice," she answered, "and accepted the much more honourable office of Pontifex Maximus, you would not have had this stroke of ill fortune. The gods evidently are averse to Puseyism; but the good prelate, of whom you have spoken, is known to me. I will be your mediatrix with him. In the mean time sacrifice a goat to Vertumnus; he will change your unproductive season to one of increase."

At that moment two girls entered the apartment, dressed in the same classical garb: the one bearing on her head a large wine-measure or *crater*; the other carrying in her arms three antique drinking-cups, shaped like an animal's head, known to scholars as the *rhyton*; and they began to pour a liquid from one into the other.

If the Vicar was not greatly mistaken, one of these nymphs had been his handmaid Patty Clark; and the other a girl he had recommended from his school. He had seen them last officiating as grooms; but their present transformation was much more pleasing in his eyes, though considerably more heathenish. However, he resolved to accept every thing he saw or heard as a matter of course; and in that spirit smiled benevolently as he took the filled cup from the hand of the classical-looking attendant.

The lean Curate could not conceal the interest he felt in the agreeable novelty presented to his astonished eyes; and when a face, not unlike that of a Bacchante, came close to him,—a figure in the flowing *stola*, kneeling on one knee, and a plump arm and hand offered a brimming measure,—he absolutely smirked, with a long-unfamiliar pleasure, as he took the vessel into his own hand.

“It is *mulsum*,” cried their hostess, as she accepted a similar cup; “you may rely upon its being made from Attic honey and genuine Faler-

nian. Come—a libation to Dyonisius.” She spilled a few drops on the ground. “Health to my friends! may the gods avert evil from their path!”

She drank from the rhyton a tolerably long draught. Brother Basilius merely bowed to his hostess, and took a few mouthfuls. Brother Simplicius, thinking he was bound to follow the example of his hospitable hostess, forgot his sacerdotal character, attempted a libation—which, however, fell upon his poor legs—and then took a taste of the beverage. He found it so nice that he allowed it to fall down his throat, gulp after gulp, with intense enjoyment, before he attempted to remove the cup from his lips.

“How do you like it?” demanded their entertainer.

“It is nectar,” replied the Vicar cheerfully.

“It is ambrosia,” said the Curate enthusiastically.

To show their approval, they both took another sup. The latter, at the conclusion of it, expressing his content by a deep respiration.

did the same, taking care to drop the libation clear of his poor legs. Then the one stared hard at the carpet, and the other as hard upon the central ornament in the ceiling; the first recollecting that he was a priest and wore sandals, the other that he was a deacon and wore a frock. Both shook their tonsured heads simultaneously.

"If you fail in guessing, you must pay forfeit," observed the lady of the house.

"I give it up," said Brother Basilius.

"And *I* give it up," said Brother Simplicius.

"Then you have only to take your choice between a cup of salt-and-water and one of pure wine."

"I prefer the latter, certainly," replied the Vicar.

The Curate thought that, as he had the prospect before him of a long walk in the cold, the more pleasant beverage would do him most good, so he voted with his superior.

The attendants disappeared, but quickly returned, bearing an *amphora* and a *carchesium*, or

beaker. The latter was filled, and handed first to the elder of the two guests, kneeling as before.

"It is true Passum of Crete," observed Miss Brabazon; "I had it direct from a Greek merchant."

Whatever it was, it was rather a large draught of wine; but as the reverend gentleman could not afford to offend his wealthy but very eccentric friend, he offered no objection—in truth swallowed the contents of the cup with much apparent satisfaction. His subordinate felt himself bound to imitate his very reverend brother, accepted the re-filled *carchesium*, and drank off the wine without a check. Their amiable hostess proposed more enigmas; but the Reverend Basil Plymmon prudently urged pressing engagements, and rose to depart.

"You had better follow my example," said his fair parishioner, springing to her feet; "there is every thing in the classical religion you Puseyites most covet. A ritual in which there is abundance of display—garments more striking than the *alb*,

the *dalmatica*, and the other mediæval splendours that you are striving to filch from the Catholics; and a position far more desirable even than the dignity of cardinal, which has dazzled the imaginations of so many clerical perverts."

"Thanks! thanks!" exclaimed the Vicar, hurrying away, yet apparently in the best possible good-humour. "I'll think of your kind offer, my dear friend. Come, reverend brother."

"Vale, my friends, vale!" cried the assumed vestal. "May the gods protect you! May Pallas Athena fill your understanding with her divine wisdom!"

The two would-be monks, with their cowls again over their heads, stepped out once more into the cold, and were presently in the high-road. Scarcely, however, had the younger of the two felt the influence of the air than a strange change came over him. He had been having one of his long fasts, and the vinous beverage he had so much enjoyed had been poured upon an empty stomach, that had long been content with no stronger potation than

toast-and-water. He suddenly felt the place reeling round. He burst into a laugh, and staggered into a kind of short run. His companion looked at him curiously, and met a pair of eyes winking at him in a most singular manner, and a cadaverous face affecting exaggerated jollity.

“Good gracious, Brother Simplicius, you’re drunk!” cried the Vicar in tones of unequivocal horror.

“Drunk!” repeated the poor man, hiccuping in his superior’s face, as he swayed his body backwards and forwards, in a vain attempt to establish an equilibrium, and speaking very thick. “Of course I’m drunk. Every body’s drunk. This road’s drunk. Don’t you see it’s sliding about in the most abominable manner? *You’re* drunk, old fellow; you know you are.”

He struck the Vicar a familiar slap on the shoulder, and then hooked on to his arm with a grip that nearly pulled him down. The thin Curate was coming out in quite a new character.

“What shall I do with him in this dreadful

state?" said his much-troubled principal to himself. "It's impossible to take him through the village. If I could get him quietly across the fields, and unobserved into the monastery by the back way, it would be an escape from a terrible scandal. I'll try."

In pursuance of this resolution Brother Simplicius was, though not without considerable difficulty, got over a stile that stood close to Brabazon Lodge, and was led or rather dragged by his companion along the comparatively unfrequented meadows.

"I'll stand by you, old cock!" he suddenly exclaimed, affecting an excess of friendship which nearly sent him and his protector into the ditch. "The Bishop sha'n't bully you! I'll punch his head!"

"Really, I can't allow such unseemly language, Mr. Perkins," replied his employer with more anger than dignity. "Respect for our ecclesiastical superiors—"

"Ecclesiastical superiors be bothered!" retorted

the other, swinging himself round till they were face to face. "I tell you I'll punch his head!"

A less sensible man even than the Reverend Basil Plynymmon must have seen at a glance that it was worse than useless opposing a creature so completely unamenable to reason as was then the unfortunate Curate.

"Very well," he said soothingly, "you may do so, if you like."

"All right!" hiccupped the other, staggering on again. Presently he came to a sudden stand-still, and laughed.

"I feel very jolly, very reverend brother," he said. "You've no objection to a little singing, have you?"

And he peered again into the face of his supporter with his lack-lustre eyes.

The Vicar knew better than to make an objection.

"None in the least," he answered promptly, "if you will proceed as fast as you can. Suppose you try a Gregorian, or any other chant—or a

Nunc dimittis, or the verse of a hymn. The people could have no right to complain, if they heard you."

"No!" shouted the other; for his small remaining consciousness was clinging to his college recollections. He tried to hold up his head as he burst forth with a verse of the long-disused *Gaudeamus*:

"Vivant omnes virgines,
Faciles, formosæ!
Vivant et mulieres,
Bonæ, laboriosæ!"

"You must join, old fellow!" cried he, again swinging himself sharp round.

The Reverend Basil Plynymmon dared not resist the miserable man's invitation, and in hope of getting him along the faster, assisted in singing the next verse.

"Good gracious, Brother Simplicius!" suddenly exclaimed the Vicar in accents of real terror, "here's Miss Pincher's finishing school coming over the stile into this very field."

Sure enough a regiment of parasols of all the colours of the rainbow were seen to bob up and

down in the distance, something like a flower-bed undergoing a succession of earthquake-shocks, and several tall girls, in smart dresses, two and two, were seen approaching.

"For Heaven's sake, let us get out of their way!" added the frightened Vicar, convulsively dragging his reluctant subordinate as far as he could from the path. "Here, stand still near the hedge, and appear to be examining the plants. They will pass on, and think we are botanising."

"Of course, old fellow," said the other quite passively.

The young ladies came on. Very much did they wonder to see the two monks of St. Hildebrand standing in that part of the field by themselves. They recognised them in a moment, because they frequently assisted in the choir and schools; Miss Pincher being the Rev. Basil Plymmon's most zealous supporter.

All was going on as harmlessly as the anxious Vicar could have desired, when, just as the taller girls approached within a few yards of the hedge,

they were surprised to see the bashful timid Curate—whom none of them had ever been able to make any thing of, and whom the more forward of the younger girls had given up as “no end of a muff”—turn his face towards them, and kiss his hand to each couple as they passed him.

His features bore such a ludicrous expression, as his cowed head kept spasmodically falling forward, as if with an intention of turning head-over-heels for their diversion, that it upset the gravity of the gravest. Some tittered, some stuffed their pocket-handkerchief into their mouths, and from the eldest to the youngest, they held down their heads, and laughed to their heart's content.

The only grave face there was that of Miss Pincher—and dreadfully grave it was. But it had not the slightest effect upon the intoxicated Brother Simplicius. Far from it. As that primest of spinsters passed him, with her head in the air, he honoured her with *two* kisses of the hand.

“Disgusting!” muttered Miss Pincher, as she flung up her very aquiline nose, and marched after

her charge, most of whom were furtively glancing back, to see what she would do when she beheld "that dreadful creature."

"Villain! wretch! idiot!" cried the apparently frantic Vicar, as, directly the school and its mistress were out of sight, he sprang upon the delinquent, and seized him by the collar of his habit, as though to give him a good shaking. Brother Simplicius caught him round the neck, and they both rolled on the grass together.

The Vicar quickly regained his legs, ashamed of having given way to violence, and proceeded to assist the unconscious offender. A doubtful kind of sound made him look over the hedge into the highway that skirted that corner of the field. He dropped his unwieldy burden instantly. Gladly would he have sunk into the ground, for at the open window of a carriage, apparently a quiet spectator of all that had occurred, was his Bishop; and, as an additional humiliation, standing in the road, with his hand on the carriage-window, was—the pig of a churchwarden.

CHAPTER IV.

REVELATIONS OF THE CONFESSIONAL.

THERE was a church in Bruges exceedingly rich in its ornamentation—not merely architectural, but artistic. The wealthy burghers must have contributed in a most princely fashion to the expense of its erection and decoration ; and the Flemish masons, the Flemish carvers, and the Flemish painters, who had been employed upon the structure, must have displayed all their talent to earn the enormous sum in guilders that had been laid out on their work.

The stained-glass windows were marvels of that precious manufacture. Nothing in the Low Countries could excell the wood-carving. The Master of Bruges, as well as several of his most distinguished successors, had executed priceless *chef-d'œuvres* for the walls. The reliquary was a

miracle of goldsmith's work ; and the furniture of the altar was imperial in its splendour.

It was not to be wondered at that all religious ceremonials performed there should have been extremely popular ; for in the good town of Bruges, as elsewhere, the best-got-up spectacle had always attracted the largest crowd. But there were holy things as well as fine things to see : the great-toe of St. Ursula in a jewelled casket ; the thigh-bone of St. Bridget in a box made of the wood of the true cross ; the entire jaw of St. Agatha in a cabinet of pure gold ; and, more precious than all, a small tress of the hair of the blessed St. Elizabeth in a case of pure crystal studded with pearls.

There were numberless other fragments of beatified humanity ; and as they were invariably attributed to female proprietors, it might very naturally be concluded that the much-envied individuals, who had a life-interest in such priceless treasures, were of the same sex. Yes, they were nuns. I shall not say of what order, as I have a particular reason for reticence on this point ; but they were an

old-established and much-respected sisterhood, to which female members of some of the noblest families, not only in Flanders but elsewhere, had thought it an honour to belong.

It was also considered by the priesthood a special distinction to be connected with this convent; and when Père Michel was appointed their confessor, it produced a sensation in every male ecclesiastical establishment throughout the city. He was a foreigner: the Flemish priests were under the impression that they had a much better right to look after the spiritual interests of a Flemish sisterhood; consequently they regarded their more fortunate reverend brother as an interloper.

But Père Michel was a man of mark in his profession. Possessed of superior talents, of ripe experience, of the highest repute for sanctity, he had the further recommendation of having been a great traveller. He had been intrusted with missions of importance to various parts of the heathen and Christian world; had not only been

to Rome, but to the Holy Land; was able to discourse of the sacred catacombs in the Eternal City, as well as of the ever-blessed sanctuaries of Jerusalem; and could vary his welcome information with picturesque accounts of the progress of the faith among the barbarous savages of the interior of Africa.

There therefore could be nothing surprising in the selection of this old man for so responsible a post, nor in the excitement that prevailed in the community when they were preparing to present themselves before him—while undergoing the somewhat trying ordeal to a few of them—of a confession.

Père Michel, as he took his seat, could he have been seen by the penitents, would have caused them no uneasiness by the austerity of his features; for though his complexion was dark, from familiarity with much warmer climates than that of Belgium, his eyes were peculiarly bright, and the expression of his countenance benevolent. His person, too, was somewhat portly, which his clerical vestments did not conceal.

The venerable Father heard a rustling. He drew aside the panel of the grating, through which the words of the nun were to proceed, and brought his ear near the opening. Then a mellow female voice was heard to address him, first in Latin, with the customary Confiteor and mea culpa, and then in French : "Very reverend Father, I am here."

"Yes, dear Mother," was the reply in the same language, in a singularly soothing and cheering tone. "Pour out your heart without reserve. It is to God you speak. I am but a humble instrument in receiving your confession ; you enjoy the favour of the Immaculate Virgin, for you have ever been an honour to her thrice-blessed service."

The Confessor knew that it was the Mother-superior who was kneeling on the other side of the confessional. He had taken care to possess himself of a tolerably accurate knowledge of her antecedents, and was quite satisfied that he should have very little to absolve.

"I have tried, very reverend Father," said the voice, evidently in a humble spirit; one highly becoming the head of a house so distinguished in the religious world; for sometimes, as the worthy priest was only too well aware, the possession of authority over other women produces no small amount of pride. "I have tried hard and long, for I was very young when I entered the community; the late Mother-superior, who was a lady of rank before she entered the order, and was my relation, took charge of my education. I never left the convent. I have no recollection of the world whence I had been taken. I was brought up with the good sisters, and became a novice. When a pupil, I accompanied the very reverend Mother-superior and several of the nuns to England, as it was her intention to found a branch establishment there, where she had powerful friends."

"Well, dear Mother," exclaimed the venerable priest mildly. He was accustomed to such superfluous personal history from his fair penitents,

and knew that he should be called upon to exercise a large amount of patience when confessing them.

"I lived very quietly and happily in our new home, very reverend father."

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear daughter. It is a special privilege; it is a great happiness to be able to lead a holy life, away from the temptations of the sinful world."

"The temptation came to me, very reverend Father."

"Eh, what? Temptation! oh, yes, dear daughter; the flesh is weak. Even within sacred walls, even completely shut out from worldly vanities, worldly follies, and worldly crimes, the temptation to sin will present itself. Human nature is fallible. God alone is perfect. What was your first sin, my dear child?"

"Looking on a man, very reverend Father."

"Oh!" cried the good priest, rather sorrowfully. He knew that the Mother-superior was a very handsome woman, and began to be appre-

hensive, from dear-bought experience, of a rather serious sequel to her small acknowledgment.

"A layman, of course," he added.

"He was a youth who had been dreadfully hurt, and had been brought into the house to be nursed by Sister Gudule."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, apparently much relieved; "attending the sick is a good work; and if the very reverend the Mother-superior sanctioned his introduction into the convent, there could be no sin in your having seen him."

"But I saw him more than once, and I felt great compassion for him, for it was not expected that he would recover. When he began to get better I saw him again. Ah! he was so young and so handsome! Yet, though he was a heretic, he knelt down beside me, and repeated an Ave Maria, word for word, with myself, for on suddenly seeing him close to me, I had fallen on my knees, and appealed to the blessed Virgin for help."

"Very right, my dear child. Well?"

Père Michel began to feel anxious.

"I was called away by the Mother-superior, and saw him no more—for he left the convent—and never entered it again. Shortly after which, as the Mother-superior found that she could not accomplish her intention, we all returned to Bruges, all except a poor novice, who died, and was buried in the cemetery."

The Confessor breathed freely again. It was, after all, only one of those nothings that form the staple of a nun's confession.

"And you returned to your religious duties, my dear child, and forgot the young man."

"I returned to my religious duties; I made the vows; I took the veil; I became a professed nun. But, oh, very reverend Father, I never could forget that handsome youth, whose bright gaze had dwelt so tenderly on mine, while repeating the Ave Maria."

"Sad—sad!" cried the good-natured Père Michel. "It is a mortal sin—a sacrilege—a terrible violation of your vow of chastity. You had become the bride of Christ. It was an abominable

profanation to think even for a moment of an earthly lover."

"I knew it, very reverend Father. I reminded myself of my vows; I looked at my habit; I regarded my crucifix; I threw myself before the image of the blessed Virgin; but despite of them—shutting them out from my eyes, as a fair cloud envelopes the blue sky—always came the same bright image, with the same tender glance, thrilling my soul with an ecstasy I never had power to restrain."

"You should have devoted yourself to holy exercises, my Mother," said the Confessor, more seriously; "you stood on the very brink of destruction. These carnal thoughts were leading your poor soul to eternal damnation."

"I was aware of my sin, and performed the heaviest penances in expiation; but in vain."

"You should have continually repeated the offices of the blessed Virgin. You should have called upon the holy Mother day and night; you should have implored the assistance of those beati-

fied members of your sex, who have proved the most brilliant examples of the virtue you so much needed."

"I did, very reverend Father. I was truly penitent; my knees were ever on the bare stones before the Immaculate Mother, imploring her divine compassion and forgiveness. When alone, my voice became hoarse with calling upon St. Ursula, St. Agatha, and all the female saints I had ever heard of as celebrated for chastity and piety. When with the sisterhood, with the loving smile that interposed between my dazzled gaze and their sacred representations, came the musically murmured words that as effectually closed my ears against the prayers and anthems which ought to have absorbed my attention."

"The manifest agency of Satan," observed the good priest.

"At last, the Immaculate Virgin (blessed be her holy name!) condescended to assist my struggles."

Père Michel drew a long breath; his good heart felt a sensible relief.

"I succeeded at last in banishing the intruding remembrance, and with it all the sinful gratification it produced."

"Much to your credit, my dear child," said the Confessor encouragingly; "of course the blessed Mother must have the honour of the victory; but if your nature had not been nourished with the diet of grace, furnished in your religious education, the devil would have triumphed, and any share in beating such an adversary is a thing to be proud of, my daughter."

The penitent did not answer immediately. Père Michel made no attempt to close the grating. He knew that silence was an interval of self-communion, from which it was attempted to derive courage to make more important revelations.

"You have conducted yourself so well, my dear child," he said presently, in quite an affectionate tone, "that you have entirely won my sympathy, as well as my respect. Have courage, therefore, and conclude your confession."

"Accept my thanks, very reverend Father. I was about to tell you that the good sister became attached to me; and when the very reverend Mother Griselda went again to England, to establish a branch of our house, those who remained elected me their Mother-superior in her place, and I have been styled Mother Felicia ever since."

"Yes, my daughter, I have heard as much."

"Soon afterwards our late Mother-superior in England sent us a novice, a girl who, in a worldly sense, was nearly related to myself, for we had been daughters of the same mother. We had, however, never seen each other; indeed, can scarcely be said to have had a distinct knowledge of each other's existence. I, having been brought up a strict Catholic, could not be expected to care much about a younger sister who lived in the world, had been educated as a Protestant, and whom, therefore, I could never meet in this world or the next."

"And your sister saw the error of her unfortunate education, and voluntarily entered your community with the object of becoming a nun?"

"Yes, very reverend Father; and was, as a postulant, about to receive the veil from Monseigneur, when one of the spectators made an outcry, which frightened her so that she fainted, and, the good Bishop insisting that the ceremony should be deferred, she was carried back to the parlour of the convent. While striving to restore her to consciousness, I noticed that the postulant had something concealed within her dress. It proved to be a miniature in a gold frame. I took it out to examine it. Judge of my feelings, my dear Father, when I immediately recognised features, alas! too well remembered."

"A most unfortunate occurrence, my dear daughter," said Père Michel, with increased seriousness of tone.

"The partiality I had succeeded, after so severe a struggle, in banishing from my nature, returned with tenfold additional force. It seemed to take possession of me to the exclusion of every duty and of every principle. There could be no

mistake; his name was engraved upon the case almost as indelibly as his features upon my heart. The tumult of feeling which the unexpected sight of that face created, made me insensible to the state of the person in whose possession I had found it. But she recovered without further help; and almost immediately missed the concealed treasure. Her embarrassment, her alarm, her intense distress did not affect me in the least. I questioned her with severity—like a judge ready to condemn a criminal,—and wrung from her the avowal that the portrait was that of a lover who had returned her love. Father!" added the voice, hoarse with passion, "she is lovely as an angel; but I hated her worse than all the devils in hell!"

"Hush! hush! my mother. This is very wicked!" cried the alarmed priest.

"She was my nearest relative; but I could have stabbed her—stifled her; poisoned her—crushed her under my feet like a reptile whose venom was in my blood."

"Stop! stop! my mother. This is shocking! this is horrible!"

"What, was *I*, who had seen him first—had been blest with his tender look, and lived on its sunshine year after year, while it lighted and warmed my narrow cell like a perpetual glory,—*I*, who had wrestled in mortal agony against its dear influence, confined within impassable walls, and surrounded by every thing likely to drive it from my presence,—was *I* to endure and succumb under this hopeless struggle, whilst she could enjoy the sunless happiness of seeing him when she pleased—of basking in his radiant looks—of hearing his honeyed words—of feeling his thrilling touch—of listening to his expressions of love—ay of receiving his tender caress,—could *I* know that such wrong had been done me, and not instinctively have sprung upon the detested wretch, and struck her dead at my feet?"

"*I* will not listen to this," exclaimed the Father Confessor, who had been getting very hot in the face. "*You* are in a state of deadly sin.

It is my duty to tell you that I cannot grant you absolution while you are in this reprehensible mood. It is not Christian! it is not womanly! it is revengeful and devilish!"

"O Father, pity me!" cried the penitent, evidently in an agony of supplication. "I was mad for the moment, and the poor child was scared by the fierceness of my look. My Immaculate Protectress again interposed, and my fiery wrath was satisfied with shouting an angry command to the pale and trembling postulant to go to her cell. Then I took the senseless miniature, hurled it against the wall, and dashed it into a thousand pieces."

"It was not proper for the novice to bring such an object into the convent," said Père Michel, wiping his face with his handkerchief. "It was a grave fault, but it was lenient in comparison with your exhibition of criminal weakness and barbarous rage. Very reverend Mother, it grieves me to be obliged to tell you that you have shown yourself most unfit for the onerous office with which you

have been intrusted. If you cannot govern yourself, you cannot be permitted to rule others. The interests of so distinguished an institution are, I am afraid, likely to suffer materially, if longer confided to your care. Therefore I shall be obliged to make a representation to Monseigneur your visitor respecting your very grave offences."

"Pardon! pardon!" cried Mother Felicia, in mingled terror and anguish. "Dear Father! I throw myself at your feet. I place myself unreservedly in your hands. I will do whatever you require. I will never think of him again. I will not harm her in any way. I promise you,—I swear to you! Have mercy, dear Father! You shall never have cause to repent your goodness."

Père Michel was naturally a good-natured man, and he shrunk from the harsh measure of disgracing the Mother-superior almost as soon as he had commenced his connection with this highly-respectable convent.

"I recommend you to proclaim a fortnight's retreat for the entire sisterhood," said the good

Father, at last. "Go through a severe course of devotional exercises and self-mortification. On the peril of your salvation molest the postulant, who has really in no way deserved the harsh treatment she has excited. Remember, eternal damnation will be your portion, if you fail in your duty to her, as her protectress, her guardian and spiritual mother. At the end of your retreat, if I find you in a better mood, I will give you absolution."

"So this is their model convent!" he muttered to himself, as he covered the grating. "That woman has been encouraging a sinful passion, ever since she took the vows. If the Mother-superior is of this description, what must be the sisterhood?"

A sharp impatient knock presently made him start out of his unpleasant reflections. He quickly drew back the panel, and again placed his ear to the opening. A groan was his first salutation.

"Daughter, be of good cheer!" he exclaimed. "Take courage. The goodness of God is infinite."

He was answered by another groan, followed by a succession of heavy sighs and "*mea culpas*."

"Call upon the Blessed Mother, my daughter! She will inspire her servant with the spirit of fortitude and truth. What are you?"

"A miserable sinner!"

This avowal was made in a barbarous patois, with a voice masculine in its harshness.

"Who are you? I should have said."

"The wretched Sister Gudule."

"Oh!" thought the good Father to himself, "this is the ugly one,—the drudge. At any rate, she can have had no handsome young fellows troubling her imagination. That's a comfort!"

Then he added in his soothing voice, "Sister Gudule, I have heard, is a zealous servant of God, and an excellent nun."

"A lie, very reverend Father; she is a wretch!"

"Humph!" murmured the Confessor; "she has the merit of plain speaking to harmonise with her plain features."

But the good Father's experience made him distrust penitents who called themselves names. Groaning, sighs, and ugly epithets were often got up for show,—in short, cases of great cry and little wool. When the real confession came, it proved some small peccadillo, scarcely worth listening to,—a confessional mountain in labour, that brought forth a mouse. He knew, however, that he must humour the delinquent.

"If your sins be as scarlet, repent, and they shall be as white as snow," he cried encouragingly.

"I do repent, very reverend Father; I have repented ever since that horrible iniquity was perpetrated by the vilest of sinners."

"Very right, my daughter. What was your transgression?"

"Having a daughter without first securing a husband."

"Wretched woman!" cried the Confessor, as much troubled as surprised. "This is absolutely worse than the other!" he thought, "and they call it a model convent! Oh, dear!"

"And this shameful thing occurred after you had entered upon a conventual life?"

"Nothing of the sort, very reverend Father. I adopted the habit and took the vows, partly from sincere repentance of my heavy transgression, and partly to escape farther temptation of the same kind."

"That alters the complexion of the case considerably; but it is an ugly fact, nevertheless. The confession is not likely to end in the *ridiculus* *mus* I had anticipated."

These unspoken reflections were scarcely concluded, when, attended with a torrent of sighs and groans, the narrative proceeded.

"Hans was the son of the miller of my native village; and I was considered by him,—and others, too, for that matter,—the prettiest girl in the whole parish."

"Uncommon queer lot of young women they must have been," thought the Confessor; but added aloud: "There is no occasion to go into particulars, my daughter. I will spare you the

recital of your fall from virtue. It is enough for me to know that you sinned and repented. Well, you became a nun?"

The penitent seemed at first a little taken aback by this direction to a short-cut through the worst part of her confession; but obedience to her superiors had been too strongly inculcated into her mind during nearly a life spent in the cloister; therefore she submitted.

"Yes, very reverend Father, I became a nun; and lived strictly within the rules, year after year, doing my best to forget Hans, and show my contrition for the wickedness I had committed."

"Good, my daughter."

"But oh, very reverend Father, I never could forget the blameless babe I had brought into a world of sin and misery; and was always frightening myself with visions of the temptations to which I had left her exposed in the wicked world I had abandoned. The good Mother-superior took pity on me, and allowed me from time to time to see to her careful bringing up."

"At last she was permitted to attend the convent-school; and, being much liked by the good sisters, they gave her the best education their teaching could produce. She won the love of every one; for she was very engaging and artless. I alone was austere to her; for she not only reminded me of my own mis-spent youth, but filled my heart with continual fear lest she also should be tempted and betrayed.

"So, when she had taken her first communion, I, with the help of the good sisters and the good Mother-superior, persuaded her into entering the convent, that, after her noviciate, she might take the veil; and so, ever after, be secure from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

"She readily consented, very reverend Father; for the dear child was so amiable, that it seemed a real pleasure to her to do what she was desired by any of the sisterhood, however distasteful it might seem. And so she was taken away from the playfellows of her youth, and the green

fields and the bright skies that had surrounded her with verdure and sunshine, and immured in the walls of a convent.

“At first she was diligent in her religious exercises, and gratified the entire community by her regularity and zeal; but my watchful eyes shortly detected a lassitude in the performance of her duties, that alarmed me for the safety of her precious soul. I was ever tormented with the consciousness that she had been born in sin; and watched her with a feverish interest that made me sensible of the slightest fault. When I found her showing signs of inattention, I exhorted her to increased vigilance; when she began to neglect her devotions, I became fierce in my denunciations; when I observed that she was growing weary of severe mortification and protracted vigils, I thundered out my complaints.

“I did not see that she was daily growing thinner and paler; I did not care to notice that at refection she ate scarcely at all; I did not think of observing that at recreation I often found

her in a corner with a tearful face. I saw, cared for, thought only of a soul that was slipping from my care into the gulf of eternal fire. I redoubled, therefore, my exhortations and denunciations, and became more harsh in my bearing towards her, and more angry in my language.

“The good Mother-superior, seeing that the child’s health was suffering, took her with us to England, on her first journey there, for change of air; but the climate did not agree with her, or the conventual life became less endurable; for she soon exhibited increased weariness; and at last became so weak that she was obliged to remain in her cell.

“Symptoms of an incurable disease manifested themselves; and then it was I discovered that she had been pining for the cheerful faces of her playmates, the fresh air, the sweet flowers, the bright stars of her happy childhood. Even on her death-bed I had no compassion. In my eyes this was the agency of the Evil One to win her soul to damnation; and up to the gates of eternal

rest I pursued her with exhortations and complaints.

"When the last moment was come," added the penitent in a choking voice, "and in a feeble whisper she asked me to forgive her, I bent down to give her one last, one only, token of motherly affection. She kissed me, breathed a little sigh, and instantly her blameless soul was wafted by the good angels to heaven."

The Confessor was absolutely wiping tears from his eyes; the good man had been listening with as much attention as feeling.

"Then?" cried the voice in tones of angry vehemence, "I became aware of my barbarity. I was stung with remorse for my cruelty to that dear innocent. I surrendered myself to grief; and, with tears of passionate sorrow, lamented my hardness of heart. I asked, as a penance, to be permitted to dig the grave in which my unhappy child was to be laid. The very reverend Mother granted my petition; and, in the solemn midnight, I went alone to the cemetery; and there, sur-

rounded by bats and owls, and other hateful creatures, I dug up the bones of the dead, till I had made a sufficient space.

“Then the precious martyr was borne to it by the good sisters, led by the good Mother-superior; and the service was touchingly as well as reverently performed; for they loved her; all loved her but one, who ought to have loved her more than the whole sisterhood. I assisted in lowering the body into the grave. I covered it with earth. I filled up the hollow; and, having smoothed the mound above, helped the good sisters in planting *immortelles* around it; hating myself the while for having been the cause of their sorrow.

“I returned to my ordinary labours and exercises, mortified the flesh more and more, and spent hour after hour in silent prayer and discipline. But I was haunted by frightful visions. From the walls near which I passed demoniac faces grinned at me in ghastly derision; and devilish jeers and hellish laughter pursued my steps. The Evil One himself looked down on me from

the top of a great spout, and shouted after me, 'Oho! there goes the mother who murdered her child! A nice creature you are to be a nun! Aha!' Then a chorus of fiendish mirth broke out all around and above me."

Père Michel never once attempted to interrupt these frantic exclamations. He listened patiently and silently. He had met with similar delusions in conventual establishments.

"Soon after this, we all went back to Bruges, very reverend Father; but my peace of mind did not return to me. I busied myself in attending to the sick, in looking after the poor, and in praying with the sinner; but a guilty conscience pursued me wherever I went. I knew that the Enemy of Souls was waiting for me, dogging my steps, and ridiculing my utmost efforts to prevent his approach.

"At last the very reverend Mother-superior took me a second time with her to England; but I was so closely pursued, that even soon after landing, while honoured with the private instruc-

tions of Monseigneur, I happened to look up, and there, in the likeness of a handsome young man, I saw the Devil waiting to pounce upon my miserable soul.

"I fainted away, very reverend Father, with fright, and then became so ill, that I was sent back to the old convent, where I have remained ever since; outwardly, I hope, all that a good Sister should be; inwardly, I know, a wretch without a heart, and, I am beginning to be afraid, without a soul. That is all, very reverend Father!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed the Confessor, under his breath; then addressed the monomaniac kindly and impressively. Tenderly did the good Father treat the unhappy woman, and very cheering and comforting was his discourse. At last he absolved her in the usual form; and directing her to tell the Sisters he should be in the confessional tomorrow, he drew the slide.

"And this is their model convent!" he muttered again, as he hastened out of the church. "I am afraid my labours here will be much heavier

than I anticipated. I have only heard the confessions of two,—the good God grant I may hear no more such. ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ And *such* evil! A Mother-superior within an ace of murdering her sister; and a professed nun, who, from ill-judged zeal working on an ignorant mind, has destroyed her own child! Very sad indeed!”

Père Michel went on his way in deep trouble, hoping to meet with something in that reputed holy city that might dissipate his distractions, and make him in a better mood for entering the confessional on the morrow.

CHAPTER V.

MONSEIGNEUR.

IN a somewhat desolate-looking chamber lay a man on a truckle-bed of the meanest description. The floor was almost bare, the walls looked cold and cheerless, the furniture was of the cheapest and rudest description. In addition to a small deal table were three stout rush-chairs; as many gaudily-coloured prints were hung over the mantel-piece; there was a large cross painted above the head of the bed; and several scriptural quotations, in good-sized characters, had been quaintly labelled round the room.

There were two other beds there, having the same sort of dark woollen coverlet, and the same large cross at the head-board; but only one had an occupant. He was a young man, with a very

pale face. His features, had they not been so ghastly, would have been considered handsome; indeed the careless chevelure, full moustache and whisker, though evidently in a state of neglect, made his head, as it rested on the coarse linen pillow-case, both interesting and picturesque.

Nevertheless, it was not easy to recognise in the very sickly-looking occupant of that humble couch the *attaché* at the British Embassy at Brussels, the member for Delamere Magna, the handsome dashing captain of one of the most crack regiments of cavalry in her Majesty's service. Yet it was so. There lay all that remained of Arthur Calverley, after a more severe conflict with death than ever he had with Sikhs in their savagest mood; after, too, having taxed to the utmost the skill, not only of the best surgeons in Bruges, but of the head of the medical department of the Belgian army, who had been sent to his assistance.

He looked, poor fellow, not only miserably weak, but still more miserably weary, as he turned

his lustreless eyes from one uninteresting object to another, till they lighted upon the figure of a nun sitting by the deal table, on a flag-chair, mixing some ingredients in a mortar. Her back was towards him, therefore he could not see her face, but guessed that she must be either a Sister of Charity or a Beguine who had become his nurse.

The idea sent his mind wandering confusedly back to a period when he was similarly cared for, and he thought he was still in the ancient ruins, recovering from his dangerous fall. But the chamber in which he now lay bore no resemblance to the narrow cell he had then tenanted, nor was the figure stooping over the table at all like the gaunt form that had then tended his hurts.

He tried to recollect what could have happened that made him feel so dreadfully sick and faint; but his ideas presented such a confused medley of Jack Scudamore and Miss Brabazon, of the Duke of Porchester and the Bishop's widow, of the Ambassador and the Dowager Countess, as well as of

Lord Madras and Jack Scudamore's daughter, that he could not approach a rational conclusion. The thought of Jack Scudamore's daughter suggested Geraldine, and there for a time he rested content.

Gradually the haze about his mind seemed to clear off under her bright influence, and he began to trace with tolerable clearness the course of recent events, till he came to the fracas in which he had been so severely handled. How long he had been in his present position he did not know. He felt that there were dressings of some kind upon his breast; but what prospect he had of being able to get away from his present very dull confinement he had no means of judging.

He drew his arms out of the coarse sheets, and displayed his weariness by a stretch, accompanied by an audible yawn.

The nun turned round hastily.

"Monsieur must not do that. He may reopen the wound."

She spoke in French, quickly, but not harshly.

"I think it is healed, or nearly so."

"Monsieur must not speak to the Sisters, unless to answer their questions," was the next address. "But here is something Monsieur le Docteur has ordered for the patient, which he must take at once."

She poured the mixture into a vessel and brought it to him. He looked upon a soft round Flemish face, that expressed more kindness than her words. Taking the vessel from her in silence, he swallowed the contents, and immediately felt refreshed.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

"The Sisters are not to answer questions, and Monsieur le Docteur said that you were not to be permitted to talk."

"Thank you, good Sister, for your kindness to me. That is all I wish to say."

"It is a pity he is a heretic," thought the nun, as she commenced clearing away the things she had been using. "Poor young man, he looks as if he would gladly listen to the truth; but, as I

have been forbid saying more to him than a very few words, I must leave him to the good God."

Just then was heard a knock at the outer door, and she hastened to open it. On seeing who it was, the nun uttered an exclamation of joy, and fell on her knees.

"It is Monseigneur!"

"Yes, my daughter," was the reply; "I have come to sit with the patient. You must leave us together."

"Assuredly, Monseigneur."

She reverently kissed a ring on his hand, and disappeared.

"Well, my dear sir," cried a cheerful voice, "we have met again, you see. I am sorry to find you so much less pleasantly situated than when I had the honour of seeing you last."

"Dr. Petre!" exclaimed the patient, as his friendly cicerone at the ruins, dressed in the modest gentlemanly garb of an English ecclesiastic travelling for his pleasure, placed one of the rush-bottomed chairs near the bedside, shook the occu-

pant of the pallet kindly by the hand, and sat down.

"Yes, Dr. Petre, if you will," he replied. "But my Catholic brethren call me Bishop of Melpotamos."

"Of course, and I am very remiss in my neglect. Permit me to say that I am much gratified by your lordship's visit."

"Oh, my dear fellow, there is no occasion for any ceremony between us. Call me what you like, only do me the justice to consider me your friend, and extremely anxious to serve you to the best of my poor ability."

The mild face of the excellent prelate beamed with quite a paternal interest. The sick man looked gratified, but did not attempt any oral acknowledgment.

"I assure you, I would at the hazard of my life have interposed to prevent any harm happening to you. But at first I had not the most remote idea what the disturbance was about; and when I got some inkling of it, and sent my priests

to your assistance, they found you in an apparently dying state. How did you come to learn that your *fiancée* was going to take the veil in that particular church, on that particular day; and why did you not, as soon as you learnt it, communicate privately with me?"

"My entrance into the building was entirely accidental. I had scarcely arrived in Bruges an hour, and knew only that you were in the city. I had come expressly to consult your Lordship about matters of profound interest to me."

"Very singular indeed! Most extraordinary! But be frank with me, my dear Captain; tell me how I can serve you."

"First, have the kindness to tell me where I am."

"You are in the infirmary attached to the convent in which a certain Sister Felicia, once of your acquaintance, is the superior, and a certain Geraldine, subsequently of your acquaintance, a postulant."

The good Bishop watched the effect of this announcement, and could not therefore fail to

observe the sudden start of surprise, and the equally sudden flush of pleasure, it created in the patient.

“And it was quite accidental your entering the Church of the Immaculate Mary, when I was in the very act of making your amiable friend Geraldine a nun?”

“Quite, my lord.”

“How much you must have been indebted to accident, my dear Calverley! You first nearly break your neck by accident, and turn the head of an innocent young novice, whose holy meditations your presence disturbed. You next get into a place where you were equally unlooked for, and by accident, and frighten an aged nun into the delusion that you were the Enemy of Souls. Again, by accident, you thrust yourself into the midst of a congregation of very zealous Catholics; disturb one of the most sacred ceremonies of their faith, and, in consequence, are presently left for dead by the fierce and angry devotees. If you can effect all this mischief by

accident, I tremble to think what terrible evils you might produce by design."

"I am very sorry, doctor, to have been the cause of so much trouble to those religious ladies; but, strange though it may seem to you, it was totally unintentional on my part. With regard to my apparently unjustifiable presence at a private conference at Dover—"

"Say no more about that, my dear Captain, I beg. You bring me back that horrible burlesque too vividly; for it was my misfortune there, too, to have to endure the chief responsibility of the mischief you created. But I am a man of the world as well as a bishop, and therefore can make allowances for these unfortunate *contretemps*. The last, however, was infinitely the most to be deplored, for its frightful consequences to yourself.

"I assure you, had not half-a-dozen powerful priests arrived at the scene of action the very moment they did, you would have been torn to pieces. As it was, it was only by declaring that

you were a maniac, who had seen a resemblance in the postulant to his lost mistress, that they were permitted to take possession of your bleeding body, open the door, on the step of which you had fallen, close it behind them, and carry you into one of the wards of the infirmary, where, as soon as I had recognised your features, I sent for the best surgeons, by the speediest messengers, for your succour."

"And I have no doubt was the means of saving my life. Pray accept my warmest thanks."

Arthur looked gratefully into the face of the friend a kind providence had so timely provided for him, and met the smile of a gratified philanthropist. He seemed to see something more than abundant benevolence. A fund of pleasant humour appeared to play around his well-shaped mouth, and sparkle in his kindly-beaming eyes.

"You shall thank me, Captain, when I have restored you to your friends hale and sound. It is necessary that I should add, I lost no time in informing the Ambassador of the accident.

Very much was that estimable man and able diplomatist astonished. In my interview with him, his Excellency was good enough to assure me, that you were the very last person on his staff he considered likely to get into such a serious scrape; so I thought it best for your sake to explain your entire innocence of any culpable intention. His Excellency, I am happy to say, was quite satisfied, and has shown himself deeply interested in your recovery."

"All this, I gratefully acknowledge, is very good of you, my dear Bishop, but—"

"You would rather hear some intelligence of my fair postulant?"

The good prelate laughed, and a faint smile played over the wan countenance his *bonhomie* was influencing very pleasantly.

"Ah, I see. You dashing young captains must needs be gallant as well as grateful. And I am bound to say that you have good cause in this instance for not forgetting your gallantry. She is one of the most charming girls I ever

beheld, and is possessed of a thoroughly innocent and truthful nature."

The invalid's paleness assumed a perceptible tinge of pink, and his eyes brightened considerably.

"Indeed, I think her a little too good for a wicked world; as a nun she would be the model-sister of the community."

The countenance of the sick man suddenly became gloomy.

"I am by no means certain that such is her destination," added the Bishop quickly. "It must depend entirely upon her own inclinations. I have thought it my duty to defer the ceremony that must precede her acceptance of monastic obligations; but, notwithstanding my ardent desire to serve you, my dear young friend, if the postulant insists on taking the black veil, I have no option in the matter."

"But do you think she will, Doctor?" inquired the invalid, with considerable anxiety.

"You ought to know the young lady's dispo-

sition better than myself," replied the prelate, with a good-humoured twinkle in his bright eyes. "Handsome young officers have so many advantages in studying the female character, which a priest, of whatever rank in the church, cannot hope to possess. Is she very stubborn in her resolutions, Captain?"

"Her nature is singularly amiable," murmured the lover; "but she seems to have been influenced by a determination as opposite to her previous feelings towards me, as it was unexpected."

"The sex, my dear friend, have an unfortunate reputation for being subject to sudden changes. Who knows but that the vane may veer round again to the opposite point of the feminine compass?"

Arthur Calverley did not look as if quite assured of this contingency.

"What I know, I will tell you," presently added his venerable friend. "I have thought it prudent to conceal from her the dangerous con-

sequences of your indiscretion. For all that, she has been incessant in her inquiries after you. Very improper, my dear Calverley, for a young woman about to renounce the vanities of a sinful world."

The good Bishop shook his silvery head with an exaggerated doleful look. The patient seemed less downcast.

"A very bad sign—a very bad sign indeed! I cannot conceal from you my serious fears that your accidental interposition has been so mischievous, I shall be obliged to prohibit the young lady entering upon a conventual life."

"A thousand thanks, dear Doctor," cried the young man eagerly.

"Now, don't be over-sanguine; remember that the case depends upon the stability of a notoriously unstable portion of human nature. I shall most likely see her in the course of the day: would it fatigue you too much to think of a message I might bear to her? I assure you a Bishop makes by no means a bad go-between."

"O Doctor! really—"

"Spare your thanks, and consider your message. Be kind enough to bear in mind that I am your friend; simply because you are the friend of honest Jack Scudamore—to whom I owe every thing in the world."

The patient heard this reference to his old acquaintance with evident surprise.

"Surely he is not a Catholic?" he inquired.

"But he is though," was the reply. "And so were his ancestors from time immemorial. He married a Protestant, and having promised on her death-bed that her only daughter should be educated in her faith, she has been so brought up by a venerable lady, with two other young people of her blood. But the grandmother had a sister abroad, who had become a Catholic. To her had been confided the charge of another girl, and the lady being the Superior of a convent, this child in time became a professed *religieuse*. The former recently paid a visit to England to establish a House of her Order, and was the means of converting both her

venerable sister and her interesting young kinswoman. The former is residing with her in the new convent; her grandniece was sent here.

"Now I hope I have given a clear explanation of whatever may have seemed mysterious to you in your acquaintance with the two daughters of the late Lord Fitzmaurice, who, I need scarcely add, belonged to a Catholic family."

"And what became of his son?" inquired his former comrade.

"Oh, he is doing extremely well," said the Bishop, in his most cheerful tones. "I have heard that he entered a merchant's house at Antwerp, where his steadiness and industry were so well appreciated, that he has been sent out to take a responsible post in a branch-establishment of the firm at Singapore."

Arthur could not at first reconcile himself to the idea of the lively ex-cornet of Hussars devoting himself to the dull labours of the counting-house; but he was much gratified to learn how manfully he had submitted to his change of fortune.

For a few minutes he remained in a reverie, recalling the mystifications that had perplexed him in the fragmentary conversations he had overheard on two memorable occasions. The fragments pieced together perfectly now, and explained the religious expressions in the Dowager Countess's last conversation with him, he had then considered so strange. The only portion of the intelligence he had just learnt that seemed to trouble him, was the fact of Geraldine's having become a catholic. This, and the knowledge that she was still within the walls of a convent, under the influence of the sisterhood, who were interested in persuading her to embrace a religious life, filled his mind with anxiety.

The impression the amiable prelate sought to convey by his half-playful, half-serious assurances, was decidedly favourable to his hopes. But could any dependence be placed on them? He might be quite as willing as he had represented, to oblige the friend of his benefactor; but was he not a Bishop of the Church of Rome, bound to regard

her advancement far before the objects of one who belonged to an antagonistic faith? Arthur Calverley had been studying diplomacy, which rarely places confidence in appearances.

The Bishop also remained silent, regarding with a genial smile the pale perplexed physiognomy before him, as if divining the heretical misgivings.

"Rest assured, my dear friend," he said cordially, and kindly taking the hand that lay on the coverlet, "all the priests of Rome are not wolves in sheep's clothing. There are good and bad in every profession, and many of my own, I am afraid, are far from what they ought to be; but I will prove that I am thoroughly sincere in my wish to serve you. To-morrow I must proceed on a journey; when I return, I have the permission of his Excellency to remove you to my own house, where there are aids to convalescence that cannot be obtained in this humble institution for the poor sick. Will you have confidence in me?"

A pressure of the hand and a grateful glance answered the question.

"Very well. In the mean time you have nothing to do, but to get well as fast as you can. You will give me your honour, as a gentleman and a soldier, not to communicate with the postulant except through me, and not to trouble the Mother-superior with either message or writing."

Arthur promptly gave the required obligation. In the last instance it was not necessary; his boyish romance had been completely absorbed into the more rational passion of his manhood. But the good Bishop had perhaps his own reasons for what he did.

"While I shall be absent," he continued, "I have provided against your feeling dull. You will enjoy the constant companionship of an excellent priest of my acquaintance—Père Michel. He has travelled a good deal, is a ripe scholar, a man of liberal sentiments and most humane inclinations; and his conversation, I am quite certain, you will find particularly entertaining. He has just been appointed confessor to this sisterhood; but I warn you not to appear curious to him respecting any

of his penitents. He knows his duty too well to blab. Now, what is to be your message to the postulant?"

The Bishop rose, and held out his hand with an air of mock gravity, that again called a smile on the wan face. Finding his friend hesitate, he pretended to help him, by suggesting one preposterous message after another. The sick man laughingly shook his head. At last he contrived to propose a more appropriate communication, to which the "go-between" jocosely gave his concurrence; and, after a warm pressure from the episcopal grasp and a fervent benediction, Arthur Calverley was left to his own reflections.

Was Monseigneur sincere?

CHAPTER VI

IN THE CONVENT PARLOUR.

MOTHER FELICIA had finished her "Retreat." She had concluded a variety of religious exercises, very much to the edification of the observant nuns.

"The very reverend Mother-superior acts like a saint," one pious sister, who wished to be overheard, declared confidently to another pious sister; who, desiring also to curry favour, replied as audibly,

"Yes, because our very reverend Mother is a saint!"

Mother Felicia was flattered in other ways by the sycophants—an element supposed to exist in most conventual establishments; but, however pleased she might be, it did not close her eyes

to the fact that she was watched—a far less pleasing evidence of the zeal of the good Sisters. She had lived in a convent long enough to know that spies are not employed without a purpose. She took the alarm, and was on her guard.

She carefully refrained from any interference with the postulant: indeed, outwardly appeared to have forgotten her existence. She never spoke to her—never acknowledged her presence—never mentioned her name. No one could have supposed that they daily met at the refectory, and were constantly associated in the services of their common faith.

Mother Felicia was unusually attentive and kind to the Sisters; especially amiable to those by whom she knew she was watched. She was determined not to exhibit any impatience of the control that was being exercised upon her. Even when the Bishop forbade her entering the infirmary, she submitted without a remark.

As she had been carefully excluded from all information respecting its occupant and his critical

state, she could not imagine the cause of the prohibition. She knew, however, well enough that she must obey; knew also that it was her best policy to do so with a good grace.

Therefore she was outwardly cheerful in her obedience, professing to believe that there was some infectious disorder in one of the wards, and that the good Bishop was evincing his love for her by preventing her from running the risk of catching it. She then strove to blind the watchers as to her knowledge of their vocation, by causing them to be constantly at her side, receiving the cherished attentions reserved exclusively for conventual favourites.

From a knowledge of these characteristics, the reader is at liberty to imagine that the Sister Felicia of the ruined monastery at Delamere was not exactly the Mother Felicia of the convent at Bruges. The change was exclusively the result of a conventual education. The natural woman had gradually been lost in the artificial woman. A constant employment of forms and phrases had

destroyed the higher attributes of womanhood, and the creature had become a machine with machinery adapted for routine employments—that at certain intervals of time would go through certain ceremonies as regularly and correctly as a barrel-organ plays its set of tunes.

Unfortunately, in driving out the more exalted instincts of human nature, the framers of the conventual system appear to have furnished increased room for the development of the meaner vices; and pride, craft, dissimulation, self-conceit, falsehood, and treachery, take the place of the affections. The dear ties of kindred, the sweet associations of home, are disowned or trampled under foot, as degrading links in the sinful slavery of the world. Every thing outside the convent-walls is regarded as under the special agency of the spirit of evil: the fairer and brighter the object, the more intense the wickedness with which it is imbued. And yet a benevolent God has fashioned such things, and made them for ages a source of unutterable joy to creatures of every condition.

Sister Felicia had been taught to renounce the devil and his works, and avoid the temptations of the world and the flesh. She never knew, however, with any thing like clearness, what she renounced, and was made to give far too comprehensive an area to what she avoided. No wonder, therefore, that the fairest works of a beneficent Creator are in the gloom of the cloister given a dark complexion; and that the innocent sympathies, the pure well-springs of a common humanity, become, by a blind prejudice, transformed into currents of impurity, and pools of stagnant sin.

Had the heart of Sister Felicia had fair-play as well as her understanding, the Mother-superior would have been very different to what she was; but her heart was daily brought under the indurating influence of an unsympathising credulity, and grew into a petrification; and her understanding was cramped and pinched, till it was able to run in the narrowest gauge of prejudice and bigotry. Poor Mother Felicia! I am sorry the very

reverend Mother-superior has disappointed the reader's expectations. But it is less her fault than the system of which the poor lady had been made the victim.

Contrasted with the novice now under her control, her feminine qualifications fall marvellously short; but this is the difference between a natural and a non-natural mode of cultivation. Geraldine was allowed the free development of her affections, guarded only by those safe-guards which natural modesty and the inculcation of sound principles of morality are sure to raise. Her childish friendship—her girlish love—elevated her nature, and maintained its purity far more effectually than could a life of uninterrupted penance, seclusion, and fanaticism.

The one Divine precept, "Love one another"—the one Divine obligation, "Honour thy natural guardians, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee"—formed her law and her gospel, that constantly influenced her in harmony with her recollections of those human

excellences which she drew from the teaching and example of the Divine Founder of her faith.

In her case there was no straining after an ideal perfection, from the fear of imaginary evils; and no devoting the mental faculties to endless repetitions of mechanical forms and sentences in a language she did not understand. Her prayers were as simple as her religion was pure. Her humility—probably the secret consciousness of her mother's humble birth—needed no senseless degradations to make it evident; her piety had its source in her infinite trust in the goodness of her Creator, and the gratification she enjoyed in its eternal evidences that surrounded her daily life. She did not require apocryphal legends or mystical homilies to teach her holy living. To the pure all things are pure—to the good all things are good. God is every where to all who have eyes to recognise His presence; but His special abiding-place is the heart of the innocent and sincere.

When the Mother-superior in England, in the peculiar, fervent, and persuasive manner of

that amiable enthusiast, assured Geraldine of her bounden duty to embrace the faith of her father and her mother, she was in a state of mind in which the prospect placed before her of a conventual life was sure to possess a wonderful fascination.

All the fair world around her, whence she had derived such inexpressible happiness, had suddenly faded from her like a vision, and her own personality had proved the most unreal portion of the fairy scene. She was ready to receive any new impression that offered consolation and refuge. Her humility and conscientiousness raised impassable barriers against the entreaties of her lover. Her love had drawn its strength from an inspiration too noble to permit what seemed to her his degradation, in marrying so much beneath him. She had been made acquainted with the Calverley policy, which had greatly strengthened her resolution. So that, when she was urged to renounce the world, the renunciation of her lover became to her a proper as well as a necessary sacrifice.

She came to Bruges. She entered the convent

walls ; the novelty of all that she saw and heard, assisted materially in reconciling the impressionable girl to the change. She, too, was made much of by the good sisters, as all novices are ; but the thought that Arthur would be saved from humiliation and the displeasure of his family, reconciled her more than the caresses of the nuns, or the new life of the cloister. She lived, also, in the comforting belief that he would soon find some one far more worthy of his love, and that she should always be able to pray for his happiness.

In these delusions Geraldine lived during her noviciate ; and the daily routine and the daily flatteries of the affectionate sisterhood had tolerably well accomplished their work. She undertook to perform her part in the ceremonial that was to shut her out eternally from what she had been taught to consider a wicked world, with all the necessary fortitude.

When, however, she heard the appealing voice of her lover, the over-strained cord snapped at once. She recovered consciousness, but only to be haunted

with terrible convictions. The idea of Arthur inconsolable, wandering about in search of her, and penetrating into the neighbourhood of her seclusion, caused her acute distress. But when she discovered that the secret source of much of her recent strength of mind had been taken from her, she seemed to lose all confidence in her ability to complete the sacrifice she had undertaken.

The harshness of the Mother-superior she attributed entirely to what she was made to consider her misconduct at the ceremony. The good Sisters believed this, and took pains to assure their unhappy associate that she was no longer in a state of grace; indeed, if she did not comply with the commands of the very reverend Mother, to send a humble message to Monseigneur, expressing contrition for her grave offence, and readiness to throw herself at his feet for pardon, and add an earnest supplication that he would order an early day for the completion of her vows,—her soul would be in positive peril.

The harshness of the Mother-superior, and the
VOL. III.

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representations of the urgent *religieuses*, did not seem to produce the desired effect. But when Monseigneur did them the honour to call at the convent, and condescended to command the presence of the obstinate postulant, they were quite sure that the scandal would very soon be brought to a conclusion.

They knew that the good Bishop saw the postulant alone, and were aware that the interview lasted a considerable time; but to their intense astonishment, and even bewilderment, no day for the ceremony had been named; and the postulant appeared to have got further from a state of grace than ever.

They would have endeavoured to draw from her what had been said by her and Monseigneur at this extraordinary conference; but, in the first place, the good Sisters found her extremely reserved; and in the next, Monseigneur had left the most positive injunctions against their interference with her in any way. If she desired to be silent, she was to be left undisturbed. They

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were to be kind to her, without attempting to intrude on her confidence. The nuns marvelled, but obeyed.

The parlour of the convent was the reception-room of the favoured few who enjoyed the privilege of passing the *grille*; and here the Mother-superior was accustomed to sit and grant audiences to those secular individuals who had claims upon her time, and hold conferences with such spiritual personages as had claims upon her consideration. The chamber seemed to have been specially prepared to create and maintain devout religious impressions, and excite the most profound conviction that the establishment to which it belonged was one of the very highest distinction.

The ceilings and the panels were adorned with intricate carvings, and the side which contained the large fireplace was covered with an elaborate mass of the same ornamentation. Angels, of a Flemish pattern, stood out in bold relief, as supporters to the arms of certain families that had

bestowed the most liberal endowments on the establishment. Here and there were other sacred personages, bearing a shield, in which were displayed the quarterings of other noble families whose daughters had entered the convent.

Within the panels were pictures delineating events in the life of the Virgin. In the principal one, quite in the corner, was the kneeling figure of a short fat burgher, who had out of his abundant wealth liberally rewarded the famous artist selected to perform the work; while one of the kings presented to the Flemish Mother and Child in another picture, held in his hand a model of the very building it adorned.

In the centre compartment was a beautiful triptich, enclosed in ivory, representing the enthronement of the Virgin between the Father and the Son, the third person of the Trinity hovering immediately over her glorified head. Opposite was a large ebony cross, containing the figure of the crucified Saviour in silver, and beneath was a group of the Virgin and Child with St.

Joseph in marble. There were also full-lengths of female saints, each distinguished by her particular symbol, and in the borders of the panels which enclosed them were their names in gothic scrolls.

The furniture was massive and richly carved. The tall chairs, with their tapestry-worked seats, had apparently belonged to Mary of Burgundy; and the quaint-looking coffer in the recess, with the golden vessels it supported, to Philip the Good. Every where there were signs of the precious handiwork of Van Eyck (John of Bruges), of John Mabuse, of Peter Porbus, or of some other master of the school of art that conferred celebrity and riches on the city—the costly offerings of the merchants who had been their best patrons.

It was here, about a week after the Bishop's visit, that Mother Felicia sat in state, on a seat that might once have done duty for a throne. She was alone, evidently absorbed in profound meditation. The cross on her breast, the beads

around her neck, were, however, as little regarded as the breviary, the missal, and other precious books of devotion that lay on a table close to her hand, or the various suggestive representations that surrounded her on every side.

The very reverend Mother-superior was not thinking of a *neuvaine* in honour of either of the saints that were highest in her estimation, nor was she reflecting on the exercises of the "retreat" she had just completed. She was thinking of the postulant. It was quite evident, from the expression in her handsome face, that her thoughts were far from agreeable.

She had contrived to enlist spies in her service,—no very difficult matter,—and had learnt why she had been excluded from the infirmary. She had ascertained that the original of the picture she had destroyed had been taken there apparently in the agonies of a cruel death, and had there remained, under the wings, as it were, of the destroying angel, as anxiously watched over as if he had been a patron of the convent, till

taken away by the Bishop in his own carriage, no one knew where.

Mother Felicia had also, through the same channel, gained some trifling particulars of the remarkable interview between the Bishop and the postulant. She had been seen to throw herself at his feet; and Monseigneur had been seen lifting her from the ground with as much affectionate solicitude, it was said, as if he had been supporting the blessed St. Agatha.

Subsequently to this she had been observed at the refectory to eat with a better appetite; and at recreation, though occasionally tears would come into her eyes, as she sat apart absorbed in her own thoughts, she was certainly, in the opinion of the watchers, more cheerful. She did not neglect any of her appointed duties—indeed, performed them with more devotion than she had previously exhibited—but said not a word about taking the veil.

The Mother-superior was also informed of the Bishop's direction to the nuns respecting their conduct to the postulant. She now mused over

these strange things, endeavouring to find an interpretation to the mystery; but her clenched hands, set teeth, and stony look, might have assured any disciple of Lavater, that it did not produce any amiable feeling.

She lived in mortal fear lest the dignity, which gave her so much consequence in her own eyes, should be taken from her; the state as well as the rule had become specially dear to her; and in her excited imagination not only was she threatened with their loss, but was goaded with the anticipation of being superseded by that "hateful girl." She was winning the Bishop by the same arts with which she had gained the love that had been forbidden to her.

As the Mother-superior was biting her lips under the influence of these very worldly feelings, the repulsive features of Sister Gudule presented themselves.

"A visitor to the very reverend Mother," she announced in her grating voice.

"Who is it, daughter?"

A card was placed in her hands. It had a black edge, and bore a name engraved on it, the reading of which seemed to create a feeling of surprise.

“Bring the lady here.”

Presently a tall female, dressed in fashionable mourning, and wearing a thick black veil, entered the parlour, followed by Sister Gudule. The Mother-superior rose from her chair of state, as the stranger advanced, carrying a letter in her gloved hand.

“I am the bearer of a communication from the Bishop of Melpotamos to the Mother-superior of this convent.”

The epistle was taken with a formal inclination of the head, the seal reverently kissed, and the contents perused. A sudden start betrayed the interest they excited; but the reader quickly had her feelings under control. The letter must have been very short, it was so quickly perused.

“Sister Gudule, tell the postulant she is wanted in the parlour.”

Sister Gudule, who had stood as still as a

statue—not an attractive one—with her hands crossed over her bosom, bowed her head submissively, and stalked out of the chamber.

“Madame will do me the honour to be seated.”

The stranger seated herself on one of the tapestry chairs, a little in the back-ground; and Mother Felicia resumed her throne, with rather an ostentatious assumption of ecclesiastical importance.

The features of her visitor could be but indistinctly seen, but she appeared to be about her own age. Her dress and prepossessing manner, at any other time, would have entitled her to the most courteous, the most caressing reception; but the purport of the note seemed to have taken the Mother-superior so much by surprise, that she was quite at a loss for words.

Before she was able to express the customary civilities, the door opened, a slight figure in the dress of a novice entered, and approached the chair of state. It was Geraldine—pale and sad, but unquestionably Geraldine.

She was about to throw herself at the feet of her Superior, when the latter rose with a haughty glance and forbidding gesture.

As they stood face to face, their likeness was evident; but it was a resemblance with a marked difference. What the elder had been, the younger was; but the once youthful Felicia wore a mask rather than a face—rigid and pitiless; while the youthful Geraldine looked the incarnation of ideal grace and tenderness.

“You sent for me, very reverend Mother,” was murmured timidly.

“You are not thought worthy of the vocation you have sought,” was the severe reply; “and Monseigneur, who is the visitor and director of this sisterhood, has commanded me to send you out of the convent without delay.”

The postulant looked more astonished than distressed by this announcement.

“But, very reverend Mother, where am I to go?” she asked.

With a haughty gesture, the other stretched

out her arm in the direction of the visitor, of whose presence Geraldine had not been aware. The latter rose and threw up her veil. The postulant fell back, then, unable to control an impulse, tottered forward, with a cry of delight, and as oblivious of conventual rules as regardless of the presence of her stately and unsympathising superior, threw herself into the affectionate arms of her old playmate and guardian.

"It is my darling mamma!" she exclaimed, with passionate earnestness. "O, I am so very, very glad!"

Tears were trembling on her lashes, and tears were chasing each other over the beautiful though pale face of the once blooming, radiant Fanny Scudamore. But the eyes of the Mother Felicia were perfectly dry. Her conventual education had made her superior to such weakness. In truth the look they possessed was expressive of a fierce nature under powerful restraint, while about the curled lips there played a smile of mingled derision and contempt.

Geraldine did not notice that her friend was in mourning—even the strange cap that proclaimed her widowhood had not attracted her attention. She seemed conscious only of the presence of the sharer and promoter of her past happiness, and received her caresses as though in a dream of joy, from which she was afraid of being rudely awakened.

At last her actual condition came home to her. Then she gently drew herself from the loving embrace, and with a very humble look knelt at the feet of her elder sister.

“Very reverend Mother,” she said, in a voice trembling with emotion, “I have had the misfortune to offend you; I am sincerely sorry, and beg to be forgiven. I shall never be a source of trouble to you again. Pray pardon the errors I may have committed, and let me bear away from here one pleasant recollection in your benediction, very reverend Mother—in your good wishes, dear sister.”

“No,” was the fierce reply of Mother Felicia,

drawing herself away, as if there was contamination in the touch of the suppliant. "You are going back to the world—and with worldly people and worldly feelings it is my priceless privilege to have nothing to do."

With a cold look, and haughty inclination of her head to her visitor—which was acknowledged only with a stiff bow—Mother Felicia swept out of the room.

A little later a carriage was seen to leave the convent-gates, bearing two ladies in the direction of the railway terminus. There is no occasion to tell the reader who they were.

Unfortunately for the lovers they were taken in totally opposite directions.

But was Monseigneur sincere?

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW ST. PETER.

BROTHER SIMPLICIUS felt unusually comfortable; and the reason was, because he was *not* Brother Simplicius. The frost had set in sharply; so sharply that sandals and bare legs became a physical impossibility—at least to sham monks of the nineteenth century; and Brother Basilius then began to be conscious that some mediæval practices, to which a large majority of his parishioners had urged strong objections, were really not to be so easily restored as he had anticipated.

He would have braved it out if he could—indeed, strove to do so. The spirit was strong, but the flesh was weak. The frost had got hold of his big toe; so he prudently dissolved the fraternity of which he had appointed himself Supe-

rior, and returned to the more endurable peculiarities of Puseyite tailoring.

It is impossible to exaggerate the intense satisfaction of the rest of the brotherhood at this unmilitary change to "as you were." Though the community consisted of only one besides the very reverend principal, his measureless content would have sufficed for a full monastery.

Did he not know what a blessed thing it would be to his poor legs to return to the warmth of stockings, trousers, shoes, and highly appreciated gaiters? Was he not aware that the impudent girls of the school in which he taught (who in no way resembled the singing charity-girls in a certain popular engraving) were in the habit of scribbling on their slates the word "Spindleshanks," and furtively showing it to each other with an unmistakeable grin? Had he not heard, too, the maid-servants, as he passed them on his rounds, nudging each other and whispering that highly improper cognomen, "the Reverend Broomsticks"?

Brother Simplicius knew these derogatory

facts, and a good many more of a similar nature; so that when he was told to lay aside the habit of the order of St. Hildebrand, and resume his somewhat shabby curate-suit, it is impossible to give an adequate idea of his gratification.

It must not be supposed that because the Reverend Basil Plynymmon had thus been forced out of his masquerade, he had at last attended to the admonitions of his diocesan, and given up the various novelties he had introduced into the services of the parish-church. This would be allowing to that distinguished Anglican reformer a prodigious deal more sense than he possessed. To the admonitions of his Bishop he had ventured to return defiant answers; indeed, so secure did he feel of his own position as a clerical celebrity, that he absolutely tendered his resignation.

Very much to his surprise, and not a little to his indignation, it was at once accepted; and this was the reason why the lean Curate was sitting so comfortably in the dining-room of the vicarage,—no longer styled the refectory of the

monastery,—in a soft-cushioned arm-chair, by a glowing fire, with a desk open before him on the table, and a pen in his hand.

Though he dipped his pen in the ink, his long nose came so near the paper, apparently from short-sightedness, that it required close observation to ascertain with which instrument he was writing. The scratching sound, however, that the process produced, certainly favoured the presumption that the metallic nib did the work. Occasionally he would look up very intently at the hook which supported the chandelier, then would bring down his face very close upon the Bath post, and the scribbling sound would be renewed.

If he were composing a sermon, it was not to him quite so serious a business as it is generally considered, for a perpetual smirk played around his lengthened jaws, and glances of intense pleasure shot out of his pale gray eyes. Was he explaining to some valued correspondent the happy change that had taken place in his poor legs?

"Mr. Perkins!" cried a loud voice.

The Curate looked up hastily, and was astonished to find that the Vicar had entered the room unperceived. He had his clerical hat on, and his clerical overcoat buttoned up to his throat.

"What are you writing?" was sharply demanded.

The Curate hesitated, and seemed a little confused.

"About Mulsum, sir," he stammered out at last.

"*Mulsum!*" echoed the reverend gentleman, for a moment in some perplexity. "About Mulsum! Oh, I remember. I thought, Mr. Perkins, your first acquaintance with that beverage had excited a life-long distaste for the subject. What *can* you have to write about Mulsum?"

Without the slightest ceremony he took up the paper, and read aloud the following lines:

"If I had Mulsum to my heart's content,
I should feel happy wherever I went;
And had I but plenty of Passam of Crete,
I should feel blessed from my head to my feet."

"Sir," observed the reader in a singularly solemn tone, "henceforth the poet Homer must give place to the poet Perkins. Even Æschylus never wrote such lines."

"Do you think so, reverend sir?" asked the much-gratified scribbler, his thin face glowing like an illuminated dial.

"Think so!" repeated the dispossessed Vicar, looking down upon the thin Curate with a smile of withering contempt. "There cannot be a doubt of it, sir. But I recommend you, Mr. Perkins, to have as little to do with the source of your inspiration as you possibly can. I can assure you the dreadful exhibition you made, on your earliest acquaintance with it, has not been forgotten by me, and never will. Have the goodness to put on your hat and greatcoat, and come with me to the schoolroom. I am going to take leave of the faithful members of the flock to whom I have been so careful a shepherd."

Very much abashed, Mr. Perkins locked his precious composition in his desk, and presently

was walking by the side of his stouter companion in the direction of St. Hildebrand's College. Not a word was spoken by either. Perhaps the first had too much on his mind, the other too little, for the demands of ordinary conversation.

Was not the Reverend Basil Plynymmon about to take a last farewell of the most zealous of his fair supporters, the most ready in their adoption of the various innovations that had brought upon his defenceless head (it still bore the tonsure) so much odium and persecution from "the weaker brethren"?

Had they not helped him, their faithful pastor, most liberally with their valuable help, and their still more valuable subscriptions? Had he not privately been in the habit of exercising for their benefit the inestimable privilege of auricular confession, and of granting them absolution from all their sins?

Alas! these prized evidences of priestly influence he was now about to abandon, with all that he had with so much trouble effected, to restore

the Anglican Church of the Middle Ages. This seemed "hard lines" to the Reverend Basil Plymmon, whose lines had so long been cast in pleasant places. No wonder, therefore, that he was silent. His heart was heavy—against his Bishop.

Did not the thin Curate remember that he was about entering a circle of fair devotees, some of whom might give more of their attention to him, when their reverend favourite had quitted the parish; and was he not sensible that several of them had already begun to look at him a good deal more than they used to do?

The young ladies of Miss Pincher's Finishing Establishment, for instance, now never met him without favouring him with a peculiar smile. He did not know, poor man, how often he had been the subject of their conversation since their memorable meeting in the meadows, and what extraordinary remarks had been made about him by the tall girls in confidential conference. Nor was he aware that a rather knowing little puss had oracularly pronounced her opinion that he was not half

the muff he looked. All that he could understand was, that an interest for him of some kind had been displayed by those charming young creatures, and he felt elated at the consciousness thereof.

Then he speculated as to the possible presence of Miss Brabazon at the meeting, and whether she would invite him to Brabazon Lodge. He was inclined to think favourably of vestal virgins in general, and gratefully of one in particular. He should like, too, to learn more respecting those classic statues in the hall. What Miss Brabazon had said about them was certainly very curious,—remarkable coincidences assuredly. The subject deserved further examination. And so did the *Mulsum*. He would not again drink any of that delicious beverage upon an empty stomach; in fact, he had made up his mind to give over fasting, except in Lent.

As Mr. Perkins could not communicate these ideas to his companion, he naturally kept them to himself; hence it was that their short walk was so singularly short of speech.

As the two reverend gentlemen entered the large schoolroom, they became aware that a considerable assemblage had collected. Almost all were females. There was diversity of condition and variety of age ; but venerable matrons, plump widows, attenuated old maids, young wives, and girls approaching womanhood, were all there, with crosses displayed on their bosoms, and strings of black beads pendent from their necks. There were gold crosses and silver, ivory and jet, according to the rank or fancy of the wearer. Some of the wealthier ladies were further distinguished by the display of long steel *chatelaines*, with an assortment of singular-looking objects dangling at the end,—a mediæval decoration of special interest in the eyes of ultra-Puseyites.

Great sensation was manifested when the dispossessed Vicar made his appearance. He seemed sensibly affected ; paused as he approached the more fashionable-looking portion of the assembly, who had congregated in the higher part of the school, and bowed over his hat with a very touch-

ing seriousness of manner. Of course there was more sensation.

The Reverend Basil Plynymmon placed his hat on the tall desk, where he usually officiated, and the Reverend Samuel Perkins placed his on a smaller desk, which had been his post when superintending the rising generation of the parish, or assisting in the prayer-meetings of their seniors. Then all knelt, and the customary prayer was repeated; then all rose, and the customary hymn was sung. There was intense fervour in the expression of every sentence of the former, as it was intoned after the ex-Vicar, and tremendous earnestness in every note of the latter as it was sung in full choir.

Then came a pause of expectation, made a hundredfold more impressive by a murmur of soft sighs, which followed after a rustle of drapery, declaring that female dresses were submitting to the ordinary pressure rendered necessary by the adoption of a sitting position.

The retiring Incumbent of Delamere Parva

stood up and looked benevolently down upon the old and the young familiar faces he knew that he was gazing upon for the last time, and beheld unmistakable evidence of their sympathy and affection. For those who had not brought smelling-bottles carried vinaigrettes; and many a furtive sniff declared to him the efforts their owners were timely making to repress their sensibility.

In a subdued voice, not very steady, he began an address, in which he informed them that his enemies had triumphed.

Every fair listener knew that the pig of a churchwarden and his latitudinarian associates were thus referred to, and they groaned their disapprobation.

Mr. Cobb might have taken to heart this affecting proof of his fair fellow-parishioners' want of appreciation of his interference in the affairs of the church, only he did not happen to be present. He had been engaged best part of the day in auditing the accounts of the Corporation of Delamere Magna, and was at that precise moment par-

ticularly enjoying himself as a guest of his Worship the Mayor.

The reverend orator then declared with indignant intonation, that by an exercise of arbitrary power, unexampled for its injustice, he had been deprived of the living of Delamere Parva, and therefore was no longer their parish-priest.

Louder groans testified their hatred of the episcopal tyrant, and their respect for his victim. Unfortunately for the good Bishop he was unable to profit by this exhibition of feeling, for he was then engaged in the House of Lords, delivering one of those lucid explanations of Church polity for which he had rendered his name famous.

Now the orator commenced the enumeration of the improvements he had effected in every thing and every body since the commencement of his ministry. He made much of the new church—he made more of the beautiful service he had introduced; the new college was done justice to; and he did not fail to notice the Coal and Blanket Club, the Visiting-the-sick-Poor So-

ciety, the Bible-Class, and other kindred institutions which he had the honour of inaugurating—at the expense of his congregation. This, however, he did not add; and for some equally inexplicable reason he omitted to mention the suppressed Order of St. Hildebrand.

His audience were apparently sensible of all they owed to him, for many an audible sniff declared that their feelings required restraint. During the next few minutes sighs swelled into sobs, for their favourite was dilating on the tender ties he had formed in the parish, in the course of his active and faithful ministry, and the difficulty—almost insuperable difficulty—he found in breaking away from them.

An odour of Preston smelling-salts, mingled with that of aromatic vinegar, as stoppers were opened, and lids moved on their hinges, proclaimed the increased pressure on the feelings of the community, as the orator dwelt on special cases of devotion to the restored Anglican Church of the Middle Ages by his affectionate sisters; and as he

wound up with expressions of exaggerated gratitude for the loving assistance so received, signs and sounds of hysteria began to accumulate, and went on as long as he proceeded in that touching strain.

Finally, he inveighed with an excess of bitter ridicule on certain features of the Low-Church section of the Reformed Church of England, prophesying the entire destruction of the Establishment, in consequence of the obstacles it put forth to the revival of Anglicanism in its purest type; concluding with another slap at the Bishop who had so unrighteously accepted his resignation.

After a good deal of clapping of fair hands, and wiping of fair eyes, a movement was observed in the front benches; the more fashionable bonnets approached closer to each other; there was a little whispering; and then all those in any way entitled to the title of lady rose, and preceded by Mrs. Admiral Proudfoot, approached the reverend orator.

He knew perfectly well the object with which they had left their seats, but affected to be startled

out of the examination of certain school-papers upon his desk.

There were marked signs of sensation as the deputation advanced, and curiosity was evidently struggling for the mastery with admiration, among the less elegantly-dressed upon the back benches, as the former formed in a half-circle on each side the tall desk, and the voice of Mrs. Proudfoot, preceded by several loud hems, became audible.

That excellent lady, in a strain of feminine eloquence, much interrupted by the necessity she seemed under of displaying the valuable lace of which her pocket-handkerchief was composed, tried to express the sentiments of the female inhabitants of the parish of Little Delamere at the loss of their beloved pastor.

She said a good deal—with a somewhat confused relation of predicate and other portions of a sentence—respecting his Christian virtues, constantly interrupting the current of her oratory with attempts to clear her throat and the application of her Valenciennes to her mouth ; but she managed

to utter a highly-coloured estimate of the merits of the victim of what she was pleased to term a shameful persecution; which elicited a loud demonstration of acquiescence from the back benches.

“I say *shameful persecution!*” said the energetic lady, and immediately loud groans and clapping of hands from the audience broke out louder than before.

The Reverend Basil Plynymmon looked completely penetrated by this unanswerable evidence of his popularity, but satisfied himself by putting his hand over his heart and bowing. He knew that something more was coming, and reserved his feelings for the urgent demand upon them that this something would produce.

Mrs. Proudfoot put her hand to her pocket, and instantly there was a sudden silence and a general straining of necks. She drew from it a very handsome silk purse of large size, that was stuffed with a close resemblance to bank-notes and gold.

Here the fair orator’s hems became louder, and the applications of the lace to her lips almost in-

cessant. Her nervousness was fast getting the better of her eloquence. But the reverend gentleman whom she was addressing was quite willing to take the deed for the word. Indeed, nothing could be clearer to him than that his affectionate friends had subscribed a parting testimonial, and had wisely determined that it should take the shape he most appreciated.

With one hand he accepted the farewell-offering, and with the other he displayed his cambric pocket-hankerchief. All his fair parishioners knew what was forthcoming, and made the most energetic sniffs at their several restoratives for weak nerves.

As they had anticipated, tears came flowing down the cheeks of the victim of persecution, and his voice became quite broken in his endeavours to make his gratitude intelligible. He wiped his eyes, and the tears flowed again; he stopped to find words to express his feelings, and then his words became still more thick and fragmentary.

There was not a dry eye in the place; even

Mr. Perkins found it necessary to ease over-excited nature with a small snivel; and when their reverend friend (having carefully deposited the offering in his breastcoat-pocket) clasped his hands spasmodically together, and permitted his head to fall on his arms spread to receive it on the desk,—in token that he was quite overcome,—agonising sobs broke out all along the back; two young Sunday-school teachers went into violent hysterics, and the matron of the college fainted dead away.

When the sufferers had been carried out into the air, and order had been partly restored, the Reverend Basil Plynymmon raised his head and stood upon his feet.

“Much that I am unable at this trying moment to express to you,” he exclaimed, looking quite as pitifully as he spoke, “must remain unsaid; but terrible as this ordeal is to your faithful pastor, it must be prolonged.

“I feel,” he added, diving into the pockets of his greatcoat, “what holy St. Peter would have

to experience, were he suddenly deprived of the gates of Paradise."

Tremendous sensation was excited when, at the conclusion of this enigmatical sentence, the speaker produced a number of *latch-keys*.

The owners flushed visibly. What a pretty compliment! What a touching sentiment! The vow of chastity they now knew was all moonshine. It was evident that their dear friend meant something, and had meant something all along. Such a reference to her home as Paradise by an unmarried man to a marriageable woman was almost a declaration; and matron, widow, or maid, each accepted the speech in that sense.

"With profound regret I part with these symbols of the most perfect confidence and the most exalted regard."

He approached each owner, presented the key to her as reverentially as if it had been a sacred mediæval relic, bending down and kissing the hand stretched out to receive it.

Mr. Perkins began to entertain the idea that

the caress would shortly be bestowed differently, and was considering whether, in that case, he would not be bound to follow so good an example.

"I have always found your hearts as open to me as your dwellings," he added with increased fervour, as he once more wiped his eyes, while the recipients of the key and the kiss seemed overpowered by the intensity of their emotions.

"Farewell, dear sisters! All of you, farewell! Be assured that I shall never forget you in my prayers. Rest satisfied that I shall always think of you as the most perfect Christians the restored Anglican Church has produced. Farewell!"

Again there was a violent outburst of sobbing and other hysterical demonstrations, and when the dreadfully distressed ladies took their handkerchiefs from their eyes, their favourite had disappeared.

As the Reverend Basil Plynymmon placed his hat upon his head at the door of the college, he took from his breastcoat-pocket with the other hand its bulky contents; looked at the purse a

moment, smiled, and put it carefully back again. He was quite satisfied that there was in it more than was necessary for the expenses of his journey—to Rome.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK SCUDAMORE IN CLOVER.

THERE was a tumultuous barking of dogs, and a rapid scampering of men and boys, as a handsome park phaeton drawn by a pair of bright bay horses was driven into the stable-yard of Delamere Court. A young lady in a black-plumed hat, and cloak of the same colour, threw the reins to one of the grooms, and sprang to the ground whip in hand, while, with a little less alacrity, an old gentleman in a dark topcoat, fur cap, leather leggings, and shooting-boots jumped out on the other side.

There were delirious barkings and jumpings of the canine species, apparently to welcome the return home of the two individuals just alluded to; and in the faces of the servants, and exclamations

of one or two of the oldest and more privileged, their gladness of heart was equally manifest.

"Down, Ponto! down, Rowley! that's enough good old Towser!" was uttered in a soft sweet voice, as the possessor of it patted the heads of the old hounds who were struggling with each other to express their personal attachment, and secure the notice they so highly prized.

"Zounds, Spot, old girl, do you want to eat me?" cried her male companion cheerily, as he gently tried to escape the affectionate demonstrations of another noble fox-hound.

"It's natur', Squire!" exclaimed Dick Wilcox, touching his velvet hunting-cap, with his jolly red face a-glow with pleasure. "Nothin' but natur', Squire. These poor dumb beastès has hearts for them they knows as love 'em, as warm and as true as ever beat in a human bussum. I be main glad to see as the ride has done you so much good, Squire."

"Thank ye, Dick. Yes, I never felt better."

Certainly Jack Scudamore had rarely, if ever,

looked better in his life. A hale old age never was more easily recognised in a ruddy laughing countenance. And as she threw up her veil a similar compliment might have been paid to the face of Jack Scudamore's daughter. The pallid complexion she had exhibited at Bruges appeared to have been replaced by her native roses, and her bright eyes once again sparkled with pride and animation as she gazed upon her father's improved looks.

Suddenly there was another outburst of tumultuous barking, and the whole canine party dashed away as a young lady on a gray horse rode into the yard, followed by half-a-dozen greyhounds. The Squire was at her bridle before even the active grooms, and helped her to dismount.

"Well, my lass, how have you enjoyed your coursing?" he asked in his kindest tones.

"Oh, wonderfully! Thank you for a very delightful day," replied another sweet voice. The fair equestrian threw up her veil, and disclosed

the face of—gracious goodness!—the miserable postulant.

But the expression of that fresh youthful loveliness had evidently no more to do with the melancholy cloister than with the antipodes. Whether the bracing air of the Downs, or the enjoyment of a new pleasure in the society of dear and loving friends, had worked the metamorphosis, I cannot say, but assuredly her now happy healthy face was totally unlike that of a nun.

“Will is coming in the dog-cart with the hares,” added the ex-novice in the same joyous tone. “And didn’t we have famous runs after them!”

“And you shall have as many more as you like, my lass. God bless your sweet face!”

The honest heart of the Squire was evidently as buoyant as that of his young guest.

“Come, Geraldine, let us dress for dinner,” cried her friend; “papa, you know, is very particular about our toilettes.”

The two girls went laughing together in the direction of their dressing-rooms by the back entrance; and the Squire, in quite as pleasant a frame of mind, after giving a few directions about, and a few caressing pats to, the horses, followed into the house, sauntering leisurely along, his hands in his pockets, and whistling "Bright canticleer."

"If that beant a change for the better," cried Dawkins, jerking his thumb towards the retreating figure of his master, "I doan't know what be. Why, before and directly arter the Dook's death the Squire moped about as though he took no interest in nothin'. When the Duchess came to live wi' he, he brightened up summut; and when tother un come, he got quite hisself again."

"It's all along o' them pretty smiling lasses," added Dick Wilcox impressively. "Their bright sunny faces would bring sunshine into a prison."

"The Squire feels hisself more comfortabler than he ever was afore," remarked Tom Rogers,

with a knowing wink and a grin. "The old horse be in clover, and he knows it, he do."

The little party met at dinner; the Squire in a neat suit of black, evidently more carefully dressed, especially about the white neck-cloth, than he had used to be; but notwithstanding his daughter's intimation respecting their toilettes, the young ladies could make no particular display, as both were in mourning—that of the elder being of a much deeper kind than that worn by the other.

They took their seats on each side the old gentleman, and their occupation seemed much less to satisfy their own wants than to attend to his. It was a very pleasing picture—the two lovely girls intent on anticipating his wishes; recommending this, persuading him to take that, filling his glass with wine, and with their lively talk striving to keep him incessantly amused; Dawkins all the while standing behind his master's chair, looking on with an aspect of decided ap-

proval, and only interposing when his services were required.

Under these circumstances it may well be imagined that honest Jack Scudamore thoroughly enjoyed his meal, and with his usual honesty he betrayed his satisfaction in his happy look and cheery voice. His fair companions were far from neglected. It was evident that both ate with a good appetite, and were in possession of excellent spirits.

The dessert having been placed on the table, Dawkins disappeared to the housekeeper's-room, to inform a select circle there, enjoying a round game, of the pleasant scene he had just witnessed; and for the special gratification of its stout mistress of the ceremonies, of the manner in which her master had enjoyed the particular delicacies in the bill of fare, of which he had been permitted to partake.

"By the way, Fanny," suddenly cried the Squire, as he filled her glass, "I saw the post-bag in the hall, as I came in, and in it, by Jove, I found a letter from Fitz."

The two girls immediately exhibited a very lively astonishment, and uttered the usual feminine exclamations, expressive of the most intense interest and excitement.

"It is strange, my dear, that he should write to me instead of to his sister," he added (the sly old fellow knowing all the while that there was nothing the least strange in the circumstance); "but no doubt it's all *pro bono publico*, so here it is for you both to peruse."

He threw it between them. The elder, as in the good old times, was intrusted with the office of reader, and lost no time in commencing the duty. She read aloud as follows:

"*Singapore, August, 185—.*

"DEAR SIR,—I received your favour and note the contents. Our house can supply any quantity desired of the principal articles of produce of this part of the globe. Edible birds'-nests are looking-up; best soy, too, is a fraction higher, but we can ship you a hogshead at the last quo-

tation, allowing for demurrage. Rice is low, so I have ventured to forward a dozen bags by ship *Coromandel*; also two chests of tea, fine and choice—known as *How-kang* and *Sing-twang*. Also one bag pepper; twelve jars preserved ginger; a case of Japan lacquered-work; ditto Chinese carved ivory. Also twenty Cochin fowls, a Brahmin bull, and a Malacca monkey.

“Hoping same will come safe to hand, I remain,

Dear sir,

Yours truly,

“MERVYN FITZ-JONES.”

“Goodness gracious!”

“What does it mean?”

“Birds’-nests and demurrage!”

“How-kang and Sing-twang!”

“Cochin fowls, Brahmin bull, and a Malacca monkey!”

“And oh, more horrible than all, to call himself *Fitz-Jones*!”

"It's absolutely hideous!"

"What does it all mean, I want to know?"

The Squire turned from one to the other of the excited speakers, with his ordinary genial physiognomy.

"Remember that he has become a man of business, my dears," he at last interposed mildly.

"Business, indeed!" echoed the Duchess scornfully; "it must be a precious business that makes him forget his own dear sister."

"He has not mentioned either of us!" cried Geraldine in tones of dismay.

"Oh, as far as *I* am concerned, he is welcome to omit *me*. I have not the ambition to expect to be named on the same page as the best soy, or with his rice and his pepper, and all that chandler's-shop stuff. But, after so long an absence, to omit even the name of so darling a sister—I haven't common patience with him!"

"Never mind, dear," murmured a sweet voice.

"Oh, but I *do* mind; I hate such cold-blooded *business*." The Duchess accentuated the last word

with supreme contempt. "And here's papa, too, taking the matter as coolly as if nothing could be more proper."

"But, my dear child, what would you have? He is only submitting to circumstances. And I am sure that it is very good of him to send me so many useful things. Indeed, I suspect that some of them must be intended for *you*."

"For *me*, papa!"

"Yes, dear. For instance, the tea, and the preserved ginger, and the Cochin fowls—and—and—the monkey."

The Squire had hesitated and sunk his voice at the last item of his list; but it had hardly escaped his lips when he ought to have been very sorry for his temerity.

"I shall not accept presents from any one who puts an affront upon my friend," she replied haughtily.

"He has only been a little forgetful of me, darling mamma; that's all," again murmured the soft voice.

"That's more than enough to set me against him," was the sharp rejoinder. "But they are not intended as presents to me, or to any body else, I would lay any wager. Mr. Fitz-Jones has become a man of business; and therefore the rubbish he has sent you, you will be expected to pay for."

"Don't be so hard upon poor Fitz," pleaded Geraldine.

"Now, papa, do me the favour to see that nothing from that source ever comes under my observation. If such absurd things should really be forwarded for my acceptance, I give you full permission to return them."

"Oh, Fanny," was the gentle remonstrance.

"Very well, my dear," replied the Squire in a tone of perfect submission. "Every thing in my house shall always be as you wish. I'm sorry for poor Fitz, though, for I don't think he meant to offend you."

The Duchess made a gesture of impatience.

"That's enough, papa. Let us change the subject."

"Very well, my dear," was the conciliatory reply; and then, as if to show his ready obedience, honest Jack Scudamore turned his ruddy face to his fair young guest, and inquired, "Did Saladin carry you well to-day?"

"Admirably," she replied, her face brightening up considerably, as more pleasant ideas were presented to her: "He is a capital lady's horse."

"So he is, my dear. My old friend gave a top price for him, for he is of a pure Arabian stock, not often imported. Did I ever tell you about Fanny's race, when she rode Saladin against Lord Vernon, on his famous horse?"

"She knows all about it, papa; I told her; tell her something else."

She poured out a glass of water, and drank, as the submissive Squire commenced a racing adventure of his own. This having been received with evident pleasure, it was followed by a description of a remarkable stag-hunt in which he had also been engaged. Then sporting story and anecdote.

dote followed in quick succession, to the increasing gratification of his audience.

Just when the animation of all three seemed to have reached its climax, the door opened, and the portly person of Mrs. Lavender appeared, bearing the coffee. This she invariably served herself, on which occasions her best dresses and handsomest ornaments—particularly a massive brooch and gold watch and chain—were sure to be displayed. As she was entertaining a little party of her own that evening, the ample lady was a little more magnificent than usual.

Her advent was hailed with peculiar satisfaction by every one of the little party at the table, and a current of very lively gossip began to flow with the fragrant beverage. The Squire took his cup and stood up, and the girls pushed back their chairs, and sipped and talked evidently quite as much at their ease, and doing equal justice to Mrs. Lavender's coffee and her new dress. That very matronly lady was, as usual, cordial and jocular with the Squire, and quite as cheerful as

she was affectionate to the young ladies. In short, a good deal of harmless mirth was soon going on in a spirit of extreme good humour. Suddenly the two younger faces became serious, and their part of the very lively conversation ceased.

This was occasioned by the Squire simply asking, "Have you got the Blue-room ready? I told you I expected a visitor who would sleep here."

"Yes, Squire," was the answer. "The gentleman is sure to find every thing comfortable."

"Then a gentleman was coming there that evening," both young ladies thought simultaneously. "How very strange that not a word should have been said to them on the subject!"

"Papa," inquired the elder in a somewhat stately manner, "is it Mr. Fitz-Jones who is expected to honour us with his society?"

"No, my dear," replied her father; "he is thousands of miles away."

She then knew who it must be; and having a particular policy of her own to develope as soon as that individual should come within her influ-

ence, she made no further remark on the arrangement.

Geraldine also knew who it must be; and she, having a particular policy of her own to demonstrate in her future relations with that individual, also silently acquiesced. Both pursued their own train of thought, and left the gossip to be shared by Mrs. Lavender and the Squire. But nothing more was said by either about "the gentleman."

As the stout housekeeper was about to retire with her china and silver equipage, a firm footstep was heard advancing, and the door again opened.

"Now," said the Duchess to herself, "for my little plan for dear Geraldine."

"Now," said the latter equally to herself, "for my little plan for my darling mamma."

Both girls started to their feet simultaneously, with the utmost surprise expressed in their countenances, when Dawkins presented himself, and in a sonorous voice announced,

"Monseigneur."

About an hour later, a party of four were sitting at the sides of a small square table, each lady opposite a gentleman. The table was covered with green baize; wax candles in antique silver candlesticks were burning upon it. Before each lady were four golden counters, and several little layers of oblong pasteboard. In the centre of the green baize were three playing-cards with their faces displayed, and in one hand of each of the little party were several others.

They were playing at whist. Absolutely the right reverend the Lord Bishop of Melpotamos had got the ex-postulant as a partner, and was engaged in a secular rubber against Jack Scudamore and his daughter. But what a game it was! The immortal Hoyle would have disowned it. The absolute authority Major A* * * would have pronounced it any thing but "whist." To be sure the young ladies held their hands before them properly arranged; but their fair faces were brilliant with an interest that was as far from gambling as heaven is from—its opposite; and

those genial-looking old fellows had their cards pressed together in their grasp, the arm resting on the green baize, or else the body reclining quite at ease against the chair.

They were gossiping, joking, laughing—doing any thing rather than playing; and their partners, entranced, as it were, with those charming reminiscences of forty years ago, became quite oblivious of rules, looked at each other occasionally in pleased surprise, and not unfrequently burst out into peals of silvery laughter.

It became evident that the venerable host and his right reverend guest had been associated in their joyous youth in all sorts of extraordinary escapades; and in their relation every thing else was forgotten, apparently by general consent. When the Bishop ended some ludicrous adventure in which he had been jointly engaged with his friend,—singularly out of character with his present very serious responsibilities,—the Squire would, with much the same hilarious earnestness, commence another, in which the same actors

distinguished themselves in some performance still more inconsistent with the senility of either.

Of course these poor girls became at times totally ignorant of how the game was proceeding; they could not have known whether they were playing short or long; they had forgotten who had taken the last trick; in short they could do nothing but watch those eloquent faces, listen to the animated talk, and join in the cheery mirth.

Suddenly the good Bishop would start up from the position in which he had enjoyed his last cackinnation, and look at his cards with attempted seriousness, and then kindly address his partner :

“Bless my heart !, I haven’t played all this time. What’s trumps, my child ?”

Or Jack Scudamore would withdraw his elbows from the table, peer over his cards, and cry out in a voice of constrained gravity, “Well, Fanny, my dear, whose trick is it? How do we stand?”

Rather confused answers were sure to be given, which did not increase the seriousness of either seniors or juniors; nevertheless, in some uncom-

monly irregular manner the game proceeded, till one of the former would appeal to the other with a fresh reminiscence, and then the pleasant interregnum would commence anew.

What seemed to astonish the fair audience was the absence of every thing resembling formality in the references of the speakers to each other. The good-natured prelate condescended to address his host by the familiar nickname of "Jack;" this did not, however, surprise them so much as the Squire calling his distinguished guest "Harry." The secret of this intimate sociality came out at last.

"Do you play a heart, my child?" inquired the Bishop across the table, in one of his momentary recollections of the demands of the game.

"No, Monseigneur," was the ex-postulant's reply; "I do not possess one."

"So I thought, my dear."

I do not like positively to affirm that a Roman Catholic Bishop could commit himself in so very secular a fashion as to wink furtively at another

old gentleman sitting beside him, while speaking to a young lady with an apparent seriousness of manner; nevertheless, in one eyelid of the right reverend father there was certainly a slight movement. It might have been entirely accidental—the ordinary action to refresh the pupil when under the influence of artificial light. Be this as it may, honest Jack Scudamore chuckled audibly.

Perhaps he saw something droll in his hand, or in the face of his daughter, for he glanced with a peculiar expression from one to the other. The countenance of the Duchess, too, wore a consciousness not there before, as she seemed intent on sorting her cards, which had been sorted nearly an hour ago.

“Forty years since, in this very room, Jack,” said the Bishop presently and in a tone of deep feeling, “you were pursuing your studies, under my tuition. I don’t think you found your preceptor difficult to please, eh, Jack?”

“No, by Jove, Harry,” cried the Squire, in his most emphatic delivery. “You were only two

or three years my senior, and could make allowances for the natural buoyancy of spirit belonging to youth."

"We were both naturally vivacious, Jack; but I think I kept you out of scrapes, and did not permit you to neglect your studies."

"That was it, Harry, exactly. Thanks to you, I got on pretty well with my learning, and never disgraced myself in any way."

"You always conducted yourself with credit, my dear old friend and pupil. But, among the innumerable good lessons I taught you, have you forgotten your music? You used to excel, I thought, in that accomplishment—in the acquisition of which we passed together many a joyous hour."

"So we did; but beyond a song at a hunt-dinner, I haven't attempted any thing of the kind for many years."

"I should like, Jack, to revive that long-disused gratification. What's become of the old book we had?"

"I haven't seen it for ages, Harry; and I'm afraid my memory is not to be relied upon."

The Duchess put down her cards, rose, and left the room. She knew very well where the old music-book was, and went to fetch it. She returned in a very few minutes, bearing a much-worn oblong volume, which she placed upon the card-table, as Dawkins entered with a tray containing hot-water, wine, and biscuits.

"Make me a nice glass of negus, my child," said the Bishop paternally to his partner.

She put down her cards, and proceeded to the tray, where the Duchess was engaged making a tumbler of the same beverage for her father.

"The dear old book, without a doubt!" exclaimed the right reverend old gentleman, delighted, as he recognised the quaintly engraved titles, and the figured bass of a variety of English duets that were popular about the close of the last century.

They drew their chairs so close, that their

silvery hair seemed to mingle. The elder then threw his right arm familiarly over the back of his former pupil's seat, while he turned the leaves with his left hand.

There had been a little whispering of surprised anticipation between the female friends over their manufacture, but it did not attract attention.

"What shall it be, Jack?"

"Whatever you like, Harry."

"Then, suppose we try this?"

"With all my heart."

Immediately two manly voices of extraordinary richness of tone joined in the lively two-part song, "Haste, my Nannette." The audience listened with breathless interest, for the composition had not only first-rate merit to recommend it, but was sung with surprising spirit. Neither seemed to be conscious of the glaring impropriety of a dignitary of the Church of Rome expressing the sentiments to which the music had been set; all they seemed conscious of, was the enjoyment of a new

pleasure. They stood still and listened, occasionally interchanging glances of astonishment and delight.

The venerable vocalists proceeded, apparently fancying that they had renewed their youth, so fresh was the vivacity of feeling they displayed.

"Well done, Jack!"

"Bravo, Harry!"

Nothing could exceed the joyousness of these exclamations, when they had finished the last bar of the performance.

"Ah, my child, it is you!" added the Bishop kindly, as he became aware that the ex-postulant was standing beside him, bearing in her hand the beverage he had asked for.

"Yes, Monseigneur," murmured a soft voice he had begun to like very much, "I have made the negus; and may I hope that you will do me the honour to like it, Monseigneur?"

"Thanks, my dear; a thousand thanks. It is excellent."

He sipped the steaming liquid, and was evi-

dently as much pleased with its taste as with its fragrance.

"Well, Fanny darling," exclaimed the Squire, as he tasted his brimming tumbler, "how did the old dad get through that, eh?"

"Charmingly, papa!" was the reply, accompanied by a smile that amply rewarded him for novel exertions. "I really cannot express my surprise, my wonder, at what I have been permitted to hear."

"Ah, my dear, you must let my old friend hear you and Geraldine," he added affectionately. "There's that very pretty duet—that German thing, you know—you sung so exquisitely with—"

"O, I don't know where it is, papa," answered the Duchess, interrupting him quickly, but with evident embarrassment.

She knew extremely well where it was. She had placed it behind the fire, that it might never again disturb her with its associations.

The good prelate saw that there was something wrong, and with ready tact came to the rescue.

"Here, Jack!" he exclaimed exultantly, as he directed his friend's attention to another title; "don't you remember what a favourite this used to be?"

"To be sure I do; and by George we'll have it at once!"

Thereupon both voices mingled in that old-fashioned duet, "Could a man be secure." The words here were quite as objectionable in the mouth of an ecclesiastic as the other lyric had been—perhaps more so—nevertheless, no one looked shocked; and the offender was assuredly quite unconscious of his offence.

The two listeners held the steaming beverage while the singers proceeded, standing on either side of them, and looking their gratification quite as eloquently as before.

"Now, my dear children," said the Bishop, a little after the close of this performance, "I must request you to retire for the night. In the first place, it is growing late, and in the next"—he added with marked emphasis—"it is essential that

my old friend should pass an hour or so with me alone. *We are going to conspire !*"

Jack Scudamore chuckled again. His daughter looked puzzled. Geraldine at once sought her chamber-candlestick.

"Good-night, my dear child," cried the good prelate to her tenderly.

"Good-night, Monseigneur," was answered with equal tenderness ; and the like benediction having been generally interchanged, the young ladies proceeded to their dressing-room.

Here they soon compared notes respecting their unexpected visitor, and the equally unexpected entertainment to which he had contributed. They were extremely fluent in their remarks during the process of unrobing and preparing their *toilette de nuit*, but did not enlighten each other in the least. They wondered, but never attempted to explain.

"O, Fanny ! what is that mark on your shoulder ?"

The Duchess shivered from head to foot at

this unlooked-for question, and turned deadly pale.

"It is nothing, dear; nothing of the slightest consequence, I mean," she replied, as soon as she could speak. "Now say your prayers like a good girl."

Geraldine was aware that her friend did not like to be questioned on some subjects, so she quietly assumed the time-honoured attitude.

It might have been expected that she would have repeated some of the long prayers in Latin she had been so carefully taught at the convent. She did nothing of the kind; she repeated word for word her simple, childish, and, of course, heretical prayers and hymn; the only novelty being a slight addition to the benediction, in the form of

"God bless *Monseigneur*, and make him as happy on earth as he is sure to be in heaven."

Then the two dear friends embraced, and sought their couch. They lay awake, however, some time before they slept the sleep of the inno-

cent and the true; one revolving her little plan, the other considering hers.

Short-sighted, but thoroughly amiable creatures, they were quite unaware that they were playing at cross purposes; they were equally ignorant of what those old gentlemen they had left down stairs were *conspiring*.

The ingenuous reader must be reminded that both the latter were "Papists;" that one was a Bishop of the Romish Church—probably a Jesuit, of course dreadfully sly; moreover that he had said nothing about Arthur Calverley, though that ill-fated young gentleman was known to have been taken by him from the infirmary, and nothing had been heard of him afterwards. Arthur was a Protestant, this was certain. Had he been enticed to change his faith? Was he immured in a monastic cell? Could he have been made the victim of a horrible conspiracy?

Monseigneur and Jack Scudamore, it is true, in no way resembled plotting followers of Loyola, or those still more dreadful members of the Holy

Office; but then it cannot be denied that they were Roman Catholics, with whom, as every body knows, appearances are awfully deceitful. Painfully aware of this, I tremble for the lovers.

CHAPTER IX.

BURGLARY.

IN one of the streets on the north side of Covent-Garden Market, towards the afternoon of a market-day, when costermongers are getting few and cabbage-leaves abundant in that intensely busy, noisy, and dirty neighbourhood, a gentleman was observed lounging carelessly along, smoking a cigar.

His handsome features, fine figure, and fashionable appearance attracted general attention among the market-gardeners' men, stout female porters of fruit and vegetables, and slovenly, tawdry, slip-shod girls, gossiping in any thing rather than "the purest well of English undefiled," near the doors of low coffee-shops and lower beer-shops of that bibulous locality. They recognised him

immediately as "a swell from the Hummums," a heir with many friends and plenty of ready money, come up to town to see life, and staying *incog.* at the hotel most in request for such occasions.

But he might have been an unusually respectable member of the Garrick Club just elected, and having made his first visit to the King-Street establishment had ventured out on a voyage of discovery. Though clad as a civilian, he had the upright bearing and *air distingué* of an officer of the Household Troops, and might, as a liberal patron of the drama, so generally popular among them, have been escorting in a hansom a meritorious danseuse or rising chorus-singer to rehearsal, and was merely taking a turn till it should be time to present himself and a similar vehicle at the stage-door.

But it so happened that he was neither a swell from the Hummums, a new and adventurous member of the Garrick, or a gallant protector of female theatrical talent. Closer observation detected well-known features, an unmistakeable

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head of hair, faultless whiskers, and an irreproachable moustache. Yes, astounding as may be the fact, the careless loungeur in this disreputable back street was no other than that supremely important personage (in a novel), "my hero!"

It was undoubtedly the handsome Captain of Hussars, the member for Delamere Magna, the *attaché* at the British embassy at Brussels, admirably acting the part of a walking gentleman, apparently with no more the matter with him than ever did affect a Calverley in a thoroughly flourishing condition.

It is quite true that he looked like one who has been freed from all fears of the Inquisition, or kindly excused the principal part in an *auto da fé*; so that it is not altogether impossible that he may have escaped the machinations of some wily old Jesuit,—I prefer not mentioning names,—or the deep-laid conspiracy of an artful old papist; (every intelligent and liberal-minded reader will at once know to whom I refer). Hence the young gentle-

man's self-complacency as he puffed at his havana.

A more commonplace explanation of Arthur Calverley's unconcern may have been found in his consciousness of complete restoration to health and strength, combined with his having visited the Foreign Office that morning and received therein a jocose remonstrance, directed against his evident tendency to interfere in the education of intended *religieuses*, which ended with a promise of the first vacancy in the post of Secretary at Legation, and the possession of a certain letter he had just received from an esteemed correspondent.

His step was elastic and the expression of his face amiably nonchalant, till he was disturbed out of his very pleasant reflections by a sudden scattering of the population of the thoroughfare. Down, without any apparent warning, came a heavy, soaking shower of rain. Arthur Calverley, as quietly as if riding at the head of his troop and fulfilling the order of "Two's about," stepped under an archway to wait for a passing cab.

No such accommodation presented itself ; indeed, the narrow street was blocked up at one end with empty market-carts, and at the other the pavement was being repaired ; so the market-gardeners' men, the stout female porters, slatternly girls, and the paviors, having rushed pell-mell into the gin-palace at the corner, and the beer-shops, the early coffee-houses, and other less creditable places of shelter, the gallant Captain presently found himself alone, with a rivulet before him bearing along a confused medley of orange-peel, cabbage-stumps, dead flowers, and decayed fruit, while the pavement was steaming with the torrent by which it had been produced.

He smoked on with an unruffled countenance ; he had been in tropical storms under far less agreeable circumstances. In a few minutes he became aware of voices within hearing distance, and looking about him detected a low window partly open, but entirely covered with one of those faded red blinds to be seen only in the rooms of low public-houses.

The conversation seemed at first to amuse him; but his countenance changed to an expression of intense earnestness, and he dashed his cigar into the nearest gutter. He had been used to dangerous vidette duty in the country of a vigilant enemy, and crept nearer the window with the cautious air of the leader of a reconnoitring party on a perilous service.

The atmosphere had become thick, and a lighted candle having been brought into the room whence the voices proceeded, two figures were shadowed on the faded curtain. Arthur drew closer to the open window, and held his breath.

"It's a beastly country," said a drawling voice; "there's nothin' go a-head about it. An enterprisin' chap hasn't a chance of doing a brisk trade any how. John Bull's too used-up even to allow hisself to be taken in."

A sort of "clack, clack," intended apparently for a chuckle, issued from another throat.

"I've come to my last dollar, and arn't at this blessed moment aware where on 'arth to look for a

cent, unless you has a mind to help me in a little bit of a adventure, such as we was sometimes reduced to when desp'rate hard up in Dixie. What do you say, old coon?"

Another sharp clicking of the teeth was made by way of answer.

"There's nothin' easier to do or safer. I've been on the sly into the very house: a lonelyish place, with only a haged lady and a helpless gal living there; except fat butler, who is to be at the Red Lion; the coachman and gardener sure to be playing at dominoes in the stable; a little maid fast asleep in the attic. The housekeeper has gone on a visit to town. Every thing as if specially arranged, you see, ducky, for our security."

"Aha! Massa so 'cute," was said in very guttural tones.

"Window opens on the larder, protected by shutter and wire-screen. The jemmy and file will soon dispose o' them, I reckon. Larder close to pantry. Then comes strong-room, with lock that can be picked as easy as a pocket."

A noise resembling the gobble of a turkey formed the response.

"Stairs at end of passage leading to old lady's dressing-room, with jewel-case on table containing family diamonds. Young lady's room over—gold watch and trinkets there. Lots o' baubles about. We've only to be silent and quick, and can clear out the place and get off with the booty in less than no time. I calculate it's a good spec. Eh, old hoss?"

"O, massa so_berry cute!" was the chuckling exclamation.

"Very well, then, it's a deal. I've hired a trap in which we can drive there and back as conveniently as if we was a takin' a fashionable airing on Broadway, New York. It's only a matter of six or seven mile along the bank of this ugly, dirty river, in which one who has been familiar with the sublime Mississippi wouldn't condescend to wash his face—that's a fact."

This idea seemed to tickle the fancy of the speaker's companion; for a paroxysm of gobbling

burst forth, as if a flock of Christmas turkeys were suddenly let out to feed.

"This cussed rain's over; so I think we'd better make tracks; but we shan't start till long arter dark. Though the old party is feeble and goes to bed early, the young'un sits up a-writing; so we'd better kinder wait a bit till all on em's asleep."

Arthur heard every word distinctly; and, with a fascination he could not withstand, remained as if rooted to the spot, waiting to hear more. But the room became both silent and dark. Then he hurried to the entrance of the archway that commanded a view of the doors of the public-house. The pavement was now being traversed by a fast-increasing throng. Arthur could see two men rapidly making their way through them. Excitedly he sprang forward to give chase. He saw them turn the next corner. When he had reached it they had disappeared.

There was not a doubt on his mind as to the house the two scoundrels intended to rob, nor as

to the identity of the ladies described as its tenants; but he was not till then aware that his adored Geraldine had returned to Rose Lawn with its ancient mistress. His former self-complacency changed to a frantic anxiety at the thought of the intrusion upon her privacy of the miscreants he had overheard. He rushed to the corner of the next street—apparently a still more disreputable thoroughfare—but beheld only a perspective of shabby shops, displaying second-hand finery; low eating-houses; windows announcing mutton-pies and stewed-eels; a barber's parti-coloured pole; a chemist's row of bright-tinted carboys; and three flashy lamps, proclaiming another gin-palace. He could see no one in the least resembling the men he had pursued.

He hurried on in a very confused state of mind till he found himself in Bow Street. The sight of a policeman's uniform suggested the proper proceeding in the emergency; and the gallant Captain stepped briskly into the police-station.

It was about ten o'clock on the same evening

that a fast-trotting horse was pulled up at the door of a roadside inn at Chiswick, and a gentleman, handing the reins to a companion in the light gig in which they were seated, jumped down, entered the house, and called out the landlord. As soon as the latter made his appearance, the person left in the gig leapt out. There was a whispered conference between the three, but it did not last long. The landlord again went into the house, and in a few minutes returned in company with the butler at Rose Lawn in full evening costume.

It was evident at a glance that the respectable Barnes was not in a state to be relied upon as an assistant in a perilous encounter.

"Glad to see you, sir," he exclaimed in a thick voice, addressing Captain Calverley, and then looking inquisitively at his somewhat stern-featured companion. "Chiswickian Sons of Harmony meet to-night, sir. Put me in the chair. Would you like to join the Chiswickians—"

Taking the fuddled chairman up terribly short, the stern-looking man announced himself as a

sergeant of the Metropolitan Police, sent to prevent an intended burglary at a house known as Rose Lawn; and commanded him to fetch the nearest local constables to his assistance.

“Rob the house, eh! That’s a good joke, Mr. Sergeant,” he replied exultantly, as he produced a key from his breeches-pocket. “Every door and window is as safe as the Bank of England; and this key opens the door which leads through the conservatory into the hall. Nobody ever uses it but myself when I attend the convivial meetings of the Sons of Harmony; and—”

Arthur, observing several white-waistcoated individuals emerging, pipe in hand, from the inn-door (probably Chiswickians in search of their president), grew impatient. Telling the sergeant to follow quickly, he snatched the key out of the hand of the butler, and started off in the direction of the cottage. He found the entrance in the wall, and hastily entered the conservatory, leaving the door open for those who were to follow. Thence he proceeded cautiously, till he knew that he was

in the hall. Stealing noiselessly to the foot of the stairs, he listened, with the sense strained to catch the slightest sound. He heard nothing. His impression was that the rascals had not effected an entrance. To satisfy himself on this point, he groped his way silently in the direction of the pantry. His foot struck something at the door. Stooping down, he felt two pairs of ankle-boots. Their weight assured him that they had been taken off and left there by the burglars—a common precaution to insure a noiseless access to plunder.

Having now no doubt that the scoundrels had effected an entrance, Arthur returned to the foot of the stairs, pausing to listen. Still he heard nothing that could excite his suspicion. Suddenly a shrill scream rang through the silent house in a sharp clear tone, that seemed to cause a vibration in every nerve of his body.

He sprang up the stairs in frantic haste, and flew lightly over the few yards of carpeted corridor to which they led, guided by a half-stifled

wailing, mingled with feeble exclamations of affright.

He paused a moment to take breath, as he approached an open door, from which light streamed into the dark passage. He heard muttered oaths, as if to silence the faint sobbing and feeble cries. Then came a crash, as of some wood-work forcibly burst or shattered.

Holding his breath, Arthur crept forward to reconnoitre. His first glance fell on the figure of his venerable friend in her night-dress, tied down in a heavy chair, a handkerchief fastened over her mouth. She was moaning as if in pain.

Following the direction of her frightened gaze, he observed a short stout negro, in a coarse jacket and trousers, with his black neck enveloped in a red worsted comforter, standing close to a dark-lantern that had been placed on a small table. He was stooping over a broken jewel-case, and examining its contents with glistening eyeballs and a horrid grin playing round his thick lips, that displayed a row of sharp white fangs, any

thing but pleasant to look upon. The light fell partly on his demoniac face and partly on the jewels, the sight of which had so strongly excited his cupidity.

A horrible imprecation, muttered as if with clenched teeth, immediately drew Arthur's attention to another part of the room, where, with the chamber-candlestick in her hand, as if it had been caught up hastily, stood a delicate female form partly undressed, her pallid face half concealed by the mass of soft shiny hair that streamed over her ivory neck and shoulders.

In spite of the ghastly stare that distorted her lovely countenance, Arthur instantly recognised his beloved Geraldine. With a rapid rush he sprung upon the tall, large-limbed, gaunt-visaged ruffian, whose coarse hand was pressed upon her beautiful mouth, and swinging him round by the collar of his thick overcoat, hurled him against a great bedstead. One of the massive posts came in contact with his head with a crash that laid him senseless on the floor.

The Captain then turned rapidly towards the negro, and caught sight of the gleam of a pistol-barrel, and the phosphoric glitter of two great yellowish-white eyeballs taking deliberate aim at him. Simultaneously with the report a loud shriek rang in his ears. Geraldine had dropped the candlestick and sprung forward as she noticed her lover's danger, then tottering two or three steps, she fell at his feet.

The sight of her blood maddened him. He made a spring at the assassin, as the latter was striving to steal away. At once a struggle of life and death took place. The two tugged and wrestled, and then rolled over and over on the floor. Whatever came in their way was upset and smashed, and the fragments scattered in every direction. Neither spoke; the conflict was too fierce for speech. No sound escaped them but the panting of their hot breath as each made the most desperate efforts to overpower the other.

The black fellow, though short, possessed extraordinary strength. More than once he pinned

his slighter antagonist to the ground in his muscular arms. He tried to put one hand in his pocket while holding him down with the other, but a prompt blow on his ugly face, directed with all the Captain's force, prevented his getting hold of the clasp-knife, with which, no doubt, he intended to end the contest, and with his teeth clattering under the effect of the blow, or his hideous eyes puffed about the lids, he would instantly resume the terrible struggle.

Fiercely Arthur cursed the tardiness of those who ought to have hurried to his assistance, and probably blamed his own folly for venturing unarmed and unsupported into such an adventure; but the desire to avenge the fate of his murdered Geraldine, who had interposed her own dear person to shield him from the ruffian's fire, remained the ruling impulse, and nerved him to increased exertion.

The fearful struggle continued; now the hideous swollen black face uppermost, now the rigid relentless white one. Over and over again the

superior strength of the negro freed him from the grip of the other ; but a sudden blow would send him staggering down, to continue the scuffle on the floor.

It was now no longer a question between them of securing or escaping ; it had mutually become a ferocious instinct to slay. The punishment the negro had received made him like a wild beast thirsting for blood ; and Arthur knew that his safety could only be secured by the life of his hideous adversary.

Both scrambled to their feet at the same moment, when Arthur heard a click, and beheld a long bowie-knife open in the grasp of the panting negro ; but quick as lightning, as the fellow drew back his sinewy arm for a plunge, Arthur sent his right hand again into his face with a tremendous thud. The black threw up his arms ; the knife flew out of his hand, he reeled back, his head fell against a cheval-glass, smashing it into fragments, and then his body dropped on the floor, shaking the room with the concussion.

Even this did not render the fellow insensible; he made efforts to rise; but his active antagonist was in a moment kneeling on his chest. The gleam of the murderous blade had brought conviction to his mind that he must decidedly and effectually settle the assassin's powers of mischief; so he seized the red comforter and twisted it round his bull throat till the yellowish phosphoric eyeballs started from their sockets, as he yelled the most horrible cries. They became fainter—they ceased—the horrible eyes assumed a fixed stare more horrible still—and a big tongue protruded from the big mouth.

Arthur loosened the ligature with a succession of heavy respirations that betrayed his sense of relief at finding that the fearful struggle had terminated. Raising his eyes from the distorted visage of his senseless enemy, his horror may be imagined, when in the only piece of the broken cheval-glass that remained in the frame, he saw the reflection of a tall, gaunt figure, with the fallen bowie-knife uplifted in his hand, coming stealthily towards him.

Arthur sprung to his feet, but believed himself lost. In his exhausted state to have to wage a deadly conflict with the other ruffian, who had recovered consciousness, and possessed the further advantage of a murderous weapon, momentarily appalled him; but a single glance at the white figure, prostrate in her blood, seemed to nerve the gallant soldier with renewed energy. He seized an overturned chair, and with panting breast and set teeth raised it in an attitude of defence.

The tall figure suddenly stopped; voices were heard in the lower part of the house. Whether it was the menacing aspect of the strange but formidable weapon within a few feet of his head, or the sound of ascending footsteps alarmed the ruffian, certain it was that he checked himself; threw a hasty glance at the windows, then dropping the knife, bounded rapidly towards the only available means of egress.

In the corridor he knocked down the fuddled butler, approaching with a blunderbuss; he dashed through a little group of resolute Sons of Harmony,

who had been hastily impressed into the service by their president; and springing like a panther down the stairs half-a-dozen at a time, would have got clear off, had he not at the bottom found himself pinioned in the stout arms of the police-sergeant, and almost simultaneously handcuffed by two local constables.

As the burglar disappeared, Arthur sprung towards the prostrate figure in the ensanguined night-dress, and with all a lover's distraction in his eyes, lifted it gently in his arms. Deep was his gratitude and profound his emotion when he felt the beating of her heart against his own. By the light of the night-lamp—which, being out of the way on the mantel-piece, had remained undisturbed—he gazed anxiously on the corpse-like face.

Though it was deadly pale, he saw the long lashes unclose, and the dove-like orbs look on him with a tenderness that thrilled every fibre of his excited frame.

"Are you safe, dear Arthur?" was murmured very gently.

“Quite, darling.”

Exquisite pleasure seemed to sparkle in her soft brown eyes, and a faint smile, expressive of intense happiness, flittered around her pale lips. She could not speak; but those innocent lips suddenly approached his own, and rested there. The next moment her silken tresses fell back, and her head dropped upon his breast. She had again fainted.

“I must beg you to retire, Captain Calverley,” said an active little man, about a quarter of an hour afterwards—the same intelligent, gentlemanly-looking personage into whose arms he had once before consigned the dear child, on his first memorable introduction to her. “But I can give you this much comfort, my dear sir; the ball has passed along a portion of the fleshy part of the arm, inflicting a superficial wound only. She has lost a great deal of blood—that, and great excitement, have reduced her to her present state. Quiet is indispensable, Captain.”

Arthur wrung the doctor’s hand, and prepared at once to obey his commands.

"The old lady," he added, "has been dreadfully frightened; but I do not apprehend any fatal consequences even to her."

Arthur, his mind much relieved, went down to the breakfast-room, where he found the two burglars, manacled and guarded, waiting for the conveyance that had been sent for to carry them to the station. Restoratives had been administered to the negro, and, except the evidence he bore in his features of the rough handling he had experienced, he was not very much the worse for the conflict.

"Now, Mr. Hiram Whittler," said the sergeant presently, with a kind of grim politeness, addressing his prisoner, "I will thank you to step out. Your carriage is in waiting."

"You'll have to pay for this, I reckon, stranger," the other replied, standing up with an affectation of dignity, "when our Minister finds as you've had the audacity to lay violent hands on, and deprived of his liberty, a free citizen of the United States, who had the misfortune to enter a

Britisher's house by mistake. I calculate you'll be obligated to eat humble pie, and send me across the Atlantic in no time."

"You'll get no further than Portland, my man," replied the sergeant; "come, look alive."

"Well, it's a beggarly country, this of yourn, that's a fact. It arn't fit for a dog to live in, is it Sambo?"

"No, massa," cried the other scoundrel, "berry bad place for nigger specially. Nebber know no place where de gennlemens hit so dam hard."

It may here suffice to add, that, as the sessions were then sitting, the course of justice was unusually rapid in dealing with these notorious offenders. The Ambassador did not interfere; and in a few weeks they were working in convict dresses in a certain very stony island that protects the harbour of Weymouth.

CHAPTER X.

A RAINBOW IN THE SKY.

CAPTAIN CALVERLEY, M.P., sat in his dressing-gown and slippers in the sitting-room of his old chambers in the Albany. He had evidently not completed his toilette. His careless necktie indicated a heart ill at ease, his slovenly *chevelure* a disordered mind. But the gloomy brow of that handsome face, what did not *that* express? Surely no dashing young officer of a crack cavalry regiment ever before looked so sombre,—no Calverley ever in his life appeared so disappointed.

In truth, so gloomy were his thoughts, so fearfully melancholy his feelings, that after ineffectually looking for consolation in the pages of Zimmerman *On Solitude*,—after vainly seeking cheerfulness from Dodd's *Prison Thoughts*,—he had

resolved to do something desperate—to write a tragedy, to start a magazine, or organise a joint-stock bank.

He had selected the first of these fearfully-desperate adventures; and having opened his writing-desk and prepared his stationery, he had written down a few dreadfully suggestive names for the principal characters, and sat in the very darkest phase of inspiration, waiting for ideas for an effective opening of his first act.

But what could have brought about so frightful a change in the circumstances and disposition of this rising diplomatist, promising statesman, and accomplished soldier? Simply this, he had taken advantage of his opportunities,—as the Calverleys had done from time immemorial,—to urge his suit to his beloved Geraldine, as soon as she had been declared convalescent.

Relying on that unspeakably affectionate demonstration she had made in his favour on the night of the *rencontre* described in the last chapter, he had, directly he found himself alone with her,—

her faithful friend having that moment left the room,—pressed her to name an early day for the consummation of his happiness. But, profoundly to his astonishment, nothing seemed further from her thoughts. She had no intention of marrying. She acknowledged herself quite unworthy to become his wife. More than this, she expressed a conviction that he need not look far to find some one a great deal better suited to him in every way, who was sure to make him as happy as he deserved to be.

It was easy to see that the dear child loved the handsome Captain as ardently as he could have desired, but that she had placed the idol of her girlish worship on so high a pedestal, and worshipped him with so humble a devotion, that she could not reconcile herself to his descending to her humiliating level. He tried every argument, he used every endearing entreaty, every passionate appeal he could think of,—she remained tender, gentle, amiable, but inflexible as a judge.

Overwhelmed with this crushing disappoint-

ment, he sought the Duchess. On making his case known to her, he only got a vehement scolding. He was flatly told that he had not employed half enough energy in the prosecution of his suit, and warmly assured that Geraldine was a treasure beyond all price, for whom the devotion of a life was scarcely a sufficient sacrifice. There was not a particle of her old warmth of manner, when they sang those passionate lyrics. On the contrary, Jack Scudamore's daughter was to him as cold as an icicle; moreover, with an obvious inclination to become as fierce as a tiger-cat on the smallest amatory provocation.

Finding that it was a hopeless case—indeed, the most absolute dead-lock he had ever heard of—he had withdrawn himself from the society of the two beautiful girls, confounding most heartily his own stupidity in making the dear impressive child acquainted with the inclinations of his family, and a little out of patience with the ultra-devotion which would not accept a Calverley at a reasonable estimation.

So the poor Captain had taken refuge in a dressing-gown and blank verse, horribly cut up with the thought that all he had suffered from his escapade at Bruges, and the capital fight he had made against two at Chiswick, had brought him only so homœopathic a recompense.

"Enter the Conspirators," he muttered to himself, "Poignardo, Strichnino, and the Cardinal Arsenio Alba, followed by the Marchesa Bella Donna."

"Hullo!"

The exclamation escaped the tragic author, on perceiving several figures entering his apartment in a slow solemn manner, something after the fashion of a succession of ghosts, or a procession of mourners.

Could he believe his eyes? Yes, the little woman in that quaker sort of dress was his dear aunt, the Bishop's relict; the big gentleman, distinguished by his fat, bald head, and bright buff waistcoat, was his dear cousin Lord Madras; the stiff, pompous, tall individual so tightly buttoned

up, as if to prevent any part of his dignity from giving way, was no other than his very fussy uncle Lord Calverley; and the rakish-looking personage, with flabby cheeks and weak eyes, so very youthfully made up, was beyond all doubt his elder brother the baronet.

The tragic poet rose with instinctive politeness, though under an inexplicable mystification as to what had caused the advent of this most unexpected family party.

"Pray be seated," he exclaimed courteously. "I need not say that I am particularly glad to see you. Yet excuse me; but I certainly should like to be enlightened as to the purport of this extremely agreeable visit."

Captain Calverley, like other handsome young officers of crack regiments, was, it seems, obliged to tell fibs sometimes.

The family party drew their chairs in a line before him; the lady, by right of her sex, placing herself at their head. They looked decidedly of a serious turn of mind. After each had grimly nodded

to their rather shrewd-featured kinswoman, she—again in right of her sex—turned solemnly to the wondering young man, and addressed him thus :

“ My dear Arthur, we have thought it our duty, after much grave and earnest consultation among ourselves, to come here to express our joint remonstrance at your very reprehensible proceedings.”

“ What in the world have I been doing wrong, aunt ?” Arthur exclaimed, taxing his memory for some peccadillo of more flagrant character than is allowable to young men of good prospects by an indulgent society.

“ You should remember, my dear,” added the old lady blandly, “ that you are a Calverley. You should not only never forget that, but you should always behave as if the solemn fact were ever present to your mind.”

“ Of course,” cried Lord Madras, authoritatively.

“ Always conduct yourself like a Calverley, sir,” said the fussy uncle.

"Yes, yes; very proper. Try to do credit to the old stock," cried the used-up rake somewhat jauntily.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the Captain, involuntarily stretching his arms in his shawl dressing-gown, as if preparing for an attack.

"You see, my dear Arthur," recommenced the spokeswoman in the same bland manner, "we all, of course, feel very anxious for your welfare, quite as Calverleys who have a position in the world should feel towards a rising Calverley. You have extremely good prospects, my dear. I should not at all wonder at your achieving high distinction, —under Divine Providence, of course. That is to say, provided you exhibit proper prudence. Prudence, Arthur, is an inestimable quality to the Calverleys."

"Nothing is more ridiculous than indulging in harem-scarem adventures."

"Especially after young women of no standing in society."

"Always fight shy of adventuresses, old chap."

Captain Calverley turned from one to the other of this solemn conclave, evidently in a fog that was growing denser every moment.

"Have the goodness to explain," he said, apparently under some constraint.

"Well, my dear, we will," replied the old lady in dove-coloured silk. "It is impossible that well-to-do Calverleys can behold one of the family neglecting his dearest interests, and not strive to bring him to a sense of what he owes to the name he bears."

"I'm still waiting for your meaning, aunt," he observed, with just a little impatience.

"There is that nameless good-for-nothing girl, Arthur—"

"What nameless, good-for-nothing girl, madam?"

The Captain's face flushed, and his tone was angry.

"Now don't be violent, Arthur. I'm a bishop's widow, remember that."

“ No, no ; let’s have respect for your seniors, sir.”

“ I’ll allow no bullying, young man.”

“ Don’t ride the high-horse. Draw it mild, my boy.”

“ Now how much better it would be, my dear,” continued the old lady in a conciliatory coaxing tone, “ instead of eternally getting yourself into danger for a young female of no consideration whatever, were you to employ your great natural advantages in endeavouring to gain so highly desirable an alliance as a marriage with the Duchess of Porchester.”

“ Ah, the Duchess ! that’s the wife for you.”

“ You ought to have married her before the Duke had proposed ; most certainly you ought, sir.”

“ A deuced pretty woman, with a miraculous lot of tin, old chap.”

If ever there was a handsome captain of a crack cavalry regiment, a promising young member of Parliament, and a rising diplomatist, tho-

roughly *riled*, it was Captain Calverley at that precise moment.

Allowance should be made for a lover just sent to Coventry by two very beautiful girls, as well as for an author interrupted in so serious a business as the composition of a tragedy.

"Madam," he cried, turning first to the shrewd relict of episcopacy, "I beg to express my sincere thanks for your interference in my affairs. My lords," he added, turning fiercely to the two noblemen, "I cannot express to you my acknowledgments for your troubling your right honourable heads so unnecessarily. Ned," he concluded, addressing his elder brother, "go to Bath!"

He then bowed in a cold formal manner to the conclave, stalked majestically into his bedroom, banged the door after him, and turned the key.

The Calverleys were transfixed with surprise. For a few minutes they stared into each others' blank faces.

"It's a case for a commission *de lunatico inquirendo*," said Lord Madras.

"The fellow's a fool!" cried Lord Calverley, in a passion.

"He's uncommon cheeky, *I* think," added the Baronet.

"I wash my hands of him," exclaimed the Bishop's widow, rising with a promptness of decision highly characteristic of that lady. "It is impossible for a Calverley to have any thing more to do with so degenerate a member of the family. He has lost our countenance for ever."

Having pronounced this very severe judgment, she walked slowly to the door, and then descended the stairs, followed in single file by the rest of the discomfited conclave.

After they had left the house, the bedroom door opened, and their still irate kinsman presented himself with a flushed face, highly expressive of offended dignity. He resumed his seat, drawing his dressing-gown around him with the air of a Roman patrician arranging his toga,

after having been bored, bothered, bullied, and badgered to an extent beyond the endurance of classical flesh-and-blood.

He cast his eyes over the very small advance he had made in his desperate undertaking.

"Enter the Conspirators—" he read from the authentic Ms. of what was to be *his* first folio. "Poignardo, Strichnino, the Cardinal Arsenico Alba, and the Marchesa Bella Donna."

"Psha!" he exclaimed impatiently, tossing the precious first page of foolscap aside, after a moment's rest of his head upon his hand and his elbow upon his desk, "I've had enough of conspirators for one day."

He started up, and began pacing the apartment with one hand in his trousers' pocket, and the other behind his back. There was a look in the face of the handsome Captain to which a novelist's powers of portrait-painting cannot do justice; and when he slapped his forehead with his disengaged hand, tightly compressed his lips, to the disarrangement of his moustache, and abso-

lutely crushed one long whisker under his arm, the picture of intense (fashionable) misery thus produced beggars imagination.

Suddenly he stopped ; his feverish eyes seemed to dilate, his flushed cheek to pale with anger, his moustache, whiskers, and remarkably fine head of hair to stand on end with indignation.

"Surely those dreadful bores cannot have come back?" he asked aloud.

There were certainly footsteps on the stairs.

"Come up, Father Mike," cried out a powerful Hibernian voice. "It's yourself will be as welcome as the flowers in May. This way, your riverence! Mind the step, honey. This is the door; there's no mistake at all, at all; and the Captain's in; so I'm in hopes I've got at last to the end of me long rambles by say and land. Blessed be the holy Virgin for that same!"

"Amen!" was added in deep tones.

The door was thrust open, and there entered a figure, in an overcoat that looked a good deal the worse for wear and dust, carrying a somewhat

battered hat in one hand, and a stout cudgel in the other. He stooped respectfully, apparently ushering in some one who was following.

"Dillon!" exclaimed Captain Calverley, as he recognised the sun-burnt Celtic physiognomy of his visitor.

"To be sure it is, every mortal inch of me," replied the latter, his marked features illumined by a broad grin. "And it won't be sorry ye'll be to see me, Captain dear, when I've tould ye what I've come to say. But here's another, the sight of whom will make your honour more glad still; I'll go bail it will. Plase to walk in, Father Mike."

Then entered, in the *soutane* and ordinary costume of a French priest, a portly figure, with the broad, benevolent, good-humoured features Arthur quickly recognised as those of his friendly acquaintance at Bruges, whom he had known during his detention in the infirmary as "Père Michel," and who had fully realised the recommendation of the good Bishop.

He sprung forward to welcome him with a hearty shake of the hand, though somewhat puzzled as to what the confessor of the nuns could have to say or do, that should gladden such a desperate man as himself.

"Sit down, Père Michel. Sit down, Mr. Dillon. Very glad to see you, after your long absence."

"Tell your story, Dillon," said the priest in an undertone, as they both followed their host's courteous invitation; he resuming his old seat, glancing from one to the other with a look of inquiry.

"Then, with his honour's permission, I'll begin at the beginning."

Arthur nodded.

"Ye'll remember, maybe," he began, "the sad business that brought me here the very last time I was in this big Babel of a place?"

"Yes, Dillon," replied the Captain, with increased gravity.

"Well, then, afther I had completed my mis-

fortunate errand, I went back to Ireland to make some inquiries for a person I thought might be able to do me an important service. I found that he had gone to Rome many a long year ago. I sold every thing I could raise money upon, and off to Rome I went as quick as I could. I got there at last; a mighty fine place entirely, and every way worthy of the Pope—more power to him.”

Père Michel smiled, and so did Captain Calverley; but what the Pope and the eternal city had to do with him, that gallant soldier could not, for the life of him, conceive.

“To the Irish College I goes, and the porter comes to the gate. ‘Is Father Mike at home?’ says I. ‘What Father Mike do you mane?’ says he: ‘is it Father Mike Donovan, or Father Mike O’Shaughnessy, or Father Mike ——’ ‘It’s Father Mike O’Dogherty,’ says I quite bowldly. ‘Oh,’ says he, ‘he went two years ago to the mission at Timbuctoo.’ ‘Holy Mother! to Timbuctoe, was it?’ says I, as terribly put to the *non plus* as a poor

Irishman without a friend, in a strange place afar off in foreign parts, could be. 'Yes; he' was sent by the Propaganda,' says he. 'I'm a proper gander meself for coming here on such a wild-goose chase,' I thought."

The good Father laughed, and the Captain volunteered a small addition to his friend's mirth; but still was unable to see how the story or the joke could interest him in the slightest degree.

"The porter was a countryman, and mighty civil; and he introduced me to the president, who, when I told him where I came from and what I wanted, was as good as a father to me; and with his assistance I managed to leave Rome the next day, the bearer of letters to the head of the mission at Timbuctoo."

Captain Calverley glanced with a mild spirit of inquiry in the direction of Père Michel. He did not quite see the necessity of travelling into the interior of Africa with such a cicerone; but the good priest merely shrugged his broad shoulders, and returned the glance with a comical expression of

sympathy. The Captain submitted to his fate. At any rate it was better than being bored by meddling relations.

"To make a long story short," resumed the narrator, "after no end of difficulties and dangers and troubles of all kinds, I found my way to Timbuctoo, and managed to get to the house of the missionaries. 'How's his riverence Father Mike?' says I to the first of the good Fathers I met. 'Who?' says he. 'Father Mike, as was sent here by the Propaganda,' says I, quite pat. 'Oh,' says he, as coolly as yer please, 'he went last week to India,' says he. 'Don't say that, now,' says I; 'for the love of the blessed saints,' says I, 'don't be afther telling me he's gone to Injy.' 'He's been appointed to an office of trust in a monastery at Calcutta,' says he.

"The short and long of it was, I up and tould the good Fathers what I came about; and they kindly assisted me to get out of Africky as quick as I could, and embark on the first vessel I might meet that was bound for the East Indies."

“My good fellow, can’t you get to the end of your story by a short cut,” mildly interposed the Captain; “it’s rather a long way from Timbuctoo to Calcutta.”

“So it is, Captain dear,” was the soothing reply; “and a dangerous way to boot, as I found to my cost; but I was obligated to go, because it was to serve your honour I went.”

“To serve *me*, Dillon?”

Père Michel laughed again, as he observed the handsome Captain’s look of astonishment.

“It’s thrue, for you, Captain dear; as you shall see for yourself in a brace of shakes.”

Arthur looked resigned.

“Well, to make a long story short—”

The gallant officer elevated his eyebrows, apparently by way of protest; then placidly twisted an end of his moustache.

“I got safe to Calcutta; and mortal glad I was when I reached the gate of the Catholic monastery there. ‘It’s Father Mike I’ve come to see,’ says I to the lay brother. ‘You don’t mean the

Reverend Father Michael O'Dogherty,' says he. 'But I do,' says I; 'plase to tell him I'm here!' 'But he sailed for Europe *yesterday*,' says he. 'Holy Moses, I'm ruined! I'm kilt! I'm murdered!' says I. 'Was there ever such a misfortunate cratur as I am this blessed minute? Oh, what'll I do! what'll I do!'

"The lay brother kindly tried to console me, and presently made my case known in the monastery. The Reverend Father Superior sent for me; and when I had tould him all I had done and suffered, he insisted on paying my passage to Europe in the next steamer; giving me directions where to go to find Father Mike at last.

"And, by the blessing of the Holy Virgin, the very first person I set my two eyes on when I stepped out of the railway-train at the end of my terrible long chase of him, was his riverence walking along the street quite asy and comfortable. You may be sure I made up to him; and when I had introduced myself, and tould the good Father what it was that had caused me to go in search of

him, he wasn't long in making up his mind. Father Mike and I were on board of the Ostend steamer the very next morning.

"And by the same token," concluded the narrator rather abruptly, "here we are."

Captain Calverley became aware that Father Mike and Père Michel were different appellations for one individual; but that was the limit of the information he had received.

"May I take the liberty to ask," he said rather coldly, as he twisted the other end of his moustache, "what interest I have in this extremely singular story?"

"Oh, bother! Haven't I told you, Captain dear?" exclaimed the Irishman with genuine surprise. "Sure and wasn't it Father Mike who married the late Lord Fitzmaurice to Geraldine Dillon, my kinswoman, and—"

Arthur Calverley leapt from his chair, and seizing a hand of Dillon in both his own, with extravagant gesticulations of gratification, shook it warmly.

"What do I not owe to you, my dear fellow!" he exclaimed with emotion.

"Just, Captain dear," the faithful fellow replied, "the pleasure of bating that spalpeen, who set this rascally business afloat, within an inch of his life."

"No, no, Dillon, we must have no violence," remonstrated the priest, while going through quite as powerful a hand-shaking. "Leave him to the law. My evidence will restore those he has so foully wronged to all their just rights; and his punishment will follow as a matter of course."

"Oh, I'll lave him to the law fast enough, Father Mike," replied his countryman, making, however, a reservation that it should be after he had given him just the laste taste in life of a bellyful of a bating.

Arthur saw an iris arching that gloomy perspective that had caused him to be so awfully desperate as to think of writing a tragedy; and the sight of it elevated his mind into a restless delirium of transport that made him quite as irra-

tional in another way. He tore off the first page of the precious *Ms.*, crumpled up the conspirators, and threw them into the grate; then suddenly turned to his guests, his face radiant with hospitality and benevolence.

"If you'll stop and take luncheon, I'll dress and accompany you to the railway," he said quite cheerfully.

"A carriage is at the door," replied the confessor. "I've arranged every thing in anticipation, even to sending forward a courier to apprise the family at Windermere Court,—where, as doubtless you already know, the Duchess has taken her aged relative and her cousin,—that we are coming."

"What a real friend you are, father!" exclaimed the grateful Arthur, with another spasmodic shake of the hand.

"That's God's blessed truth, your honour!" added Dillon.

Arthur suddenly left the priest and sprang to the bell-rope. This he gave such a desperate tug

as a demonstration of his cordiality that it broke from its fastenings. He flung it aside and hurried to the other, which no doubt would have shared its fate, so energetically was he "on hospitable thoughts intent," had not the door suddenly opened, and the Captain's soldier-valet presented himself, evidently impressed with the idea that the peal he had just been startled by betokened nothing less than a conflagration.

"Luncheon directly for these gentlemen."

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me just a few minutes;" and master as well as servant disappeared.

"Didn't ye come of a good ould stock, ye spalpeen?" said the priest in a stage-whisper of a rich Milesian accent to his companion, whose face had suddenly flushed. "Don't ye know that the O'Dillon was king of the O'Dillon country when the Calverleys were nowhere?—I mean no disrespect to the Captain, who's infinitely the best of a poor race:—so don't let me see ye blushing again when ye're called a gentleman. You've

been as faithful and honourable as ever was the first gentleman in the land."

"But it's only an agent I am, father dear," remonstrated the poor fellow, not quite reconciled to his accession of dignity.

The entrance of the servant with a well-covered butler's-tray checked an impressive rejoinder.

The two had sat down to what promised a most substantial and appetising meal; Father Mike had said grace, and both were commencing upon the viands, when the door of communication opened, and their host, in his shirt-sleeves, thrust-in his head.

"There's portable soup in the house, father; it can be served up in a minute."

"I shall do very well with what I see before me, my dear sir," was the prompt reply.

"Dillon, have some soup, there's a good fellow."

"What's enough for Father Mike is lashings for me," replied the other.

The Captain went back to the duties of the toilet.

"This is a capital Strasburg ham. Dillon, let me help you to some, with a leg of this capon."

"And mighty glad I'll be to ate that same, father dear," said his countryman, accepting the well-filled plate.

"There's a *pâté de foie gras* in the larder, father. You'll surely have some of that."

The Captain's face, half covered with lather, appeared at the open door, and, the wet towel in his hand, declared that he had interrupted his lavation to attend to his guests.

"Ah, that's a great delicacy, my dear Captain," said the father good-humouredly. "I am afraid my self-denial cannot withstand such an extraordinary temptation."

"And part of a *dindon aux truffes*; it's excellent. You must indeed taste it."

"I'm in your hands, my dear young friend. Do as you like with me."

"Dillon, tell my man to bring up the *pâté de foie gras* and the *dindon aux truffes*."

Dillon went to the head of the stairs, and to

the consternation of every one who heard him, called to the servant to bring up "the patty of foreign grass and the ding-dong in the troughs."

"Ye omadhaun!" whispered the good priest emphatically, as the agent, rubbing his hands in great glee, returned to his seat, "remember, now, that the *pâté* is a pie made of the livers of geese, and the *dindon* a turkey stuffed with truffles."

"Holy Moses! livers of geese! Who'd have thought of that, now?" exclaimed Dillon, in a tremendous state of astonishment. "And why the dickens can't they call things by their right names? Isn't turkey more nat'ral to spake, and a dale asier?"

"Hold your tongue, and remember you're a gentleman," replied Father Mike. "Here come the foreign delicacies; ate every thing as if ye'd been use to it all your life, and don't be betraying your ignorance like a brute baste, ye bogtrotter, or I'll never give ye absolution again as long as I live."

Dillon looked alarmed; and when the servant placed the *pâté* and the *dindon* on the table, allowed himself to be helped, and began to eat with an exaggerated assumption of relish.

"Very fine this, Dillon?" observed the father inquiringly.

"Oh, mighty fine it is, entirely, your reverence," he answered briskly, masticating the liver somewhat gingerly. Then dropping his voice, added close to the priest's ear, "Faith, it's just my humble opinion that an Irish stew is a king to it."

"Have some of the *dindon*, my friend; it is really capital," exclaimed the good father, his round face glowing with enjoyment. "Did you ever taste a better, now?"

"Niver, upon my life, Father Mike," replied his companion with immense fervour, as he disposed of the first mouthful; then added confidentially, "Arrah, then, what's the like of it compared to wholesome pratees and buttermilk?"

"Ye'll never be a gentleman, if ye live to the

Day of Judgment," replied Father Mike in the same tone, evidently thoroughly enjoying the comestible to which he had helped himself.

"What have they given you to drink?" suddenly demanded the Captain, with an ivory-backed brush in each hand, as he rushed in to see how his friends were getting on. The servant was in the act of opening a bottle of pale ale.

"Oh, never mind the malt," he added hastily.

"Rogers, open some wine directly."

"Yes, sir. What shall it be, sir?"

"There's excellent Hock in the house, father. Would you prefer Hockheimer or Liebfraumilch?"

"Oh, either will do very well, Captain."

"Dillon, old fellow, which will you take?"

"Oh, then, I'm not so mighty particular, Captain dear; but I think I'm most partial to the—to the—bedad, if the name hasn't gone clane out of me mind."

"Bring a bottle of both, Higgins; one of Burgundy, and one of champagne."

"Yes, sir."

Both disappeared again.

The priest helped himself to the foaming tumbler that had been poured out for him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, fetching a deep respiration as he put down the empty glass; "that's refreshing; take a good draught, Dillon, to wash down the *dindon*."

The excellent counsel was followed implicitly.

"Ah!" cried the agent, with a violent hiccup as he finished his tumbler; "it's as refreshing as pump-wather, every morsel, your riverence." Then he added in a whisper, with a finger on the side of his nose, "Jist a noggin of rale potheen in it, Father Mike, would make it a dale more drinkable."

Higgins entering with the wine and glasses on a tray stopped further confidential opinions, and the guests continued their repast with subdued enjoyment while the green glasses were being filled.

The good priest swallowed his Hock with the

air of a connoisseur, and the agent imitated him as closely as he could. Nevertheless, when he had tossed off the choice Liebfraumilch, he whispered to his companion, "Isn't it small cider, now, Father Mike?"

"An exquisite vintage!" exclaimed the other, pretending not to hear the question, and holding out his glass for more. He made two or three sips at it, smacking his lips with evident relish. Dillon did the same, concluding the ceremony by drawing the back of his hands over his mouth.

"Use your napkin, ye ill-mannered clown!" whispered the priest.

"Oh, the napkin, is it? what'll I do with it, father dear?" cried the other, taking the damask from his lap, where he had placed it, in close imitation of his companion.

"Ate it, if ye like, ye irreclaimable bogtrotter," cried the good father impatiently.

"Ate it!" was echoed with a look of intense amazement. "Oh, thin, your riverence, it's too full intirely I am."

"Some Burgundy, Mr. Dillon?" inquired the attentive valet, having filled for the other guest.

Dillon nodded; then watching his reverend model, followed his movements with the correctness of a reflector.

"Capital! Bouquet and flavour of the very choicest. A matchless Hermitage, eh, Dillon?"

"Wonderfully capital, Father Mike! It bates the hermitage at Ballycrannigan to smithereens."

"Now, then, I'm quite ready," cried the Captain, rushing in, as he was in the act of putting on his coat. "We'll just have a glass of champagne a piece, and then be off."

"I'm quite at your service," promptly replied the priest, rising and throwing down his napkin. Dillon regained his feet in a moment. The champagne-glasses bubbled up.

"Here's to your health and *happiness*, my dear sir!" exclaimed Father Mike, laying particular stress on the last word.

"Your health and *happiness*, Captain dear!" echoed his humble friend.

"Thanks, thanks; and I drink every body's health and every body's happiness," replied their host joyously; and then the glasses were tossed off.

"Exquisite!" said the good father, looking a great deal more easy in his mind than when in the confessional.

"There's the making of a tidyish kind of small-beer in it, anyhow," was the aside of the agent, as he put down his empty glass.

"Now, then, for the terminus!" cried the impatient lover.

"If you please, sir, your scarf is a little on one side," observed the valet, much marvelling at his master's inattention in a matter of such vital importance; "and the waistcoat is buttoned all wrong. Allow me, sir."

"Take another glass of Madame Clicquot, Father Mike. Help yourself, Dillon."

These directions were followed without any excuses, and then their host was quite ready.

"Higgins," said Father Mike, addressing the valet, "I think you had better put-up some of your master's things in a portmanteau, and follow him to Delamere Court by the next train. It's not unlikely he may stay several days."

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir."

"Thank you again, father, for being so thoughtful. I had really forgotten every thing."

In a few minutes Arthur Calverley was seated beside his friends, about to commence a journey which the rainbow now glowing so brightly in his landscape assured him would be the most eventful one in his career. He reflected on what he should do, and on what he should say. The new position of affairs was one that required great delicacy of manipulation. He must be very careful, or the dead-lock would be a dead-lock still.

What if the dear child chose to remain single, not to separate herself from her friend? What if she insisted on his marrying the Duchess?

Look at his prospects as favourably as he would, Arthur was sensible of a complication that

demanding the very nicest diplomatic caution and adroitness to manage. Nevertheless he was full of hope.

But was Monseigneur sincere?

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE'S DIPLOMACY.

JACK SCUDAMORE reëntered the house by the French window that opened into the new flower-garden. As it had only recently been completed, he had been taken on a tour of inspection by the two charming girls for whose gratification he had had it designed, at enormous cost; and the sight of their happy blooming faces, and the sound of their joyous voices as they rambled from terrace to terrace, and beheld parterre after parterre of radiant blossoms, disposed in the most artistic grouping, well recompensed him for his outlay.

“A telegram, Squire,” said Dawkins, putting a folded coloured paper into his master’s hand.

“Hope nobody’s dead. Old friends, you know.

Sometimes survivors telegraph the melancholy intelligence."

"Yes, Squire. But you'll soon know, if you read what's inside."

"So I suppose; but where's my glasses? Oh, here comes the Duchess; she'll read it for me."

Dawkins withdrew.

The young ladies entered, having dispossessed themselves of their hats and mantles.

"What is it, papa?" inquired the elder, noticing a change in the expression of her father's generally happy face.

"Somebody's sent me a telegram, my dear. Perhaps it's to tell me Sir Harry's broke his neck, or Lord Vernon's had a fit. By George, I wish people were as ready to send good news as they are to send bad! But, after all, it may be to declare the result of the race at Doncaster, where Coriolanus is to run for the Cup, you know. I daresay that's it."

The Duchess made no reply, opened the paper, and at once proceeded to read aloud.

“ ‘Mervyn Fitz-Jones to John Scudamore, Esq.’—Fitz-Jones !” she repeated with marked emphasis.

“ Oh, it’s from Fitz ; I’m *so* glad !” exclaimed Geraldine, clapping her hands.

“ ‘ I’ve just arrived in England, and am coming by express. My love to the dear little kittens.’ ”

The Duchess flung the paper disdainfully away. It was instantly pounced upon by Geraldine, as something inexpressibly precious.

“ Of course, papa, you are at liberty to invite who you like to your own house.”

“ Yes, my dear,” replied the Squire, as if thanking her for the privilege.

“ And it is only right and proper that Geraldine should see her own brother as much and as often as she pleases.”

“ Yes, darling mamma,” answered the orphan in her tenderest accents.

“ But I do not like this Mr. Fitz-Jones ; he is very forward and presuming. I think a merchant’s clerk, or a bagman, or whatever he is, ought not

to take such liberties. To send monkeys to me, indeed; and to refer to me as a kitten,—I won't put up with it. So during his visit I shall go and stay at Brabazon Lodge."

"My dear, the poor fellow means no harm."

"Dear Fanny, don't go away."

"I detest the very name of the man!"

"MR. FITZ-JONES!" cried Dawkins, as loud as he could bawl, as he opened the door.

The Duchess shrunk back, expecting to see a snobbishly-dressed mercantile-looking individual, with possibly a pen behind his ear, and his pockets filled with samples.

Geraldine sprung forward; not troubling her warm heart with any idea of her brother's costume. He might come in gaiters and a pigtail, for all she cared. The visitor was her "Fitz;" that was enough for her affectionate nature.

The Squire stood still, with one hand projecting forward, apparently for a welcome, and an indescribable funny kind of look in his honest face.

Presently there appeared in the doorway a handsome young fellow in the imposing uniform of a Captain of Lancers; but with an empty sleeve, with his eyeglass to his eye, and an air of unmistakable fashion in his general appearance; while a saucy smile lit up his features, as a joyous glance from his bright brown eyes roved from one to the other of the little party before him.

"It is Fitz!" exclaimed his sister with a cry of delight, as she sprung towards him, and flung her arms about his neck.

"Yes, my pet," replied the young officer, throwing his one arm affectionately round her waist. "It's either Fitz, or an uncommon good imitation of him. Well, Squire, how are you? and how's every body, and every body's wife, and every body's daughter? Won't you introduce me?"

They had shaken hands very cordially just before this question was put, the Duchess standing a little aloof, but regarding the scene with mingled feelings of interest and embarrassment.

"Oh, certainly," replied Jack Scudamore, chuckling as he advanced towards his daughter. "Don't you remember reading in the papers about a Captain Fitzmaurice, my dear, who distinguished himself last year in India?"

"Perfectly."

"Allow me to introduce you, Captain:—my daughter, the Duchess of Porchester."

The Captain bowed, and the lady curtsied, with a tremendous assumption of gravity in one, and an air of being dreadfully puzzled in the other.

"But, papa, I do not quite understand," said the Duchess; "I thought that this gentleman's name was—a—Fitz-Jones—was it not?"

"Quite right, Duchess," replied the young officer, holding himself very upright, after another graceful genuflexion, and twirling the end of a small light moustache with fashionable *sang froid*; "I had the honour of bearing that illustrious appellation—for about five minutes."

Geraldine laughed very merrily.

"You see, my dear," interposed the Squire, in some apparent confusion.

"But I *don't* see, papa!" said the young lady, turning round upon him rather sharply. "I was led to believe that Fitz" (she dropped the plebeian affix, perhaps unconsciously) "had entered a merchant's counting-house somewhere in the East. Indeed, if I was not dreaming, I read a letter from him, offering to sell soy and rice and pepper."

"A decided sell, certainly. Eh, Squire?" whispered the pretended clerk to his somewhat flustered friend.

"Oh, here comes Monseigneur! He'll explain the affair to you, my dear, better than I can."

The door opened, and not only the good Bishop, but the venerable dowager, in a wheel-chair, directed by her respectful and respectable butler, entered; the former stooping and listening with the greatest possible attention and interest to the still voluble old lady.

The young Captain received a hearty welcome from the prelate, as soon as he had released himself from the dowager's affectionate embrace, evidently reciprocating the warmth of feeling it manifested.

"Monseigneur," cried the elder of the two young ladies approaching him, with her handsome features still wearing a look of intense perplexity, "I have been referred to you for an explanation of this most extraordinary mystery about my darling Geraldine's brother."

"Well, you see, my dear Duchess—"

"But I *don't* see, Monseigneur," she repeated in a higher key.

"Your father thought," continued the amiable Bishop with his most benevolent smile, "that it would be better, instead of letting the young gentleman devote himself to the uncongenial drudgery of a merchant's office, to purchase an exchange for him into a cavalry-regiment ordered to India; but to prevent any annoyance to him as the possessor of a dropped title, he continued the name, while it was given out that the ex-Earl

had become content with a very much humbler position."

"Oh, indeed!" cried the lady, apparently much amused, yet a little offended. Then she turned quickly round to her father: "Papa, of all the sly-boots that ever came under my observation, you have shown yourself to us two poor deluded girls the most artful."

Geraldine had seized hold of his hand, and was kissing it, with grateful tears welling from her soft brown eyes.

"I shouldn't have been able to have done it without the Bishop's assistance," observed Jack Scudamore, apologetically.

"I'm afraid that I am the chief offender, Duchess," added the prelate; "but your father's heart is as soft as wax, my child, so I found no great difficulty in moulding it to a generous purpose,—in behalf too, remember, of the dearest friends of his beloved daughter."

The Duchess looked him full in the face. She saw nothing there to make her angry. On the

contrary, she beheld what softened her excited feelings. She seized his hand and reverently kissed the ring upon it, while her bright eyes were dimmed by the moisture that trembled on their long lashes.

Monseigneur stooped down and kissed her forehead; his own orbs appearing a little misty.

"Forget and forgive, Fanny," cried the cheery voice of Jack Scudamore. "I don't think we've done any great harm, after all."

"I never shall forget, papa," she exclaimed with even more than her usual impetuosity, as she dashed the tears from her cheeks.

"She does look very well indeed," cried the shrill voice of the dowager, in reply to some observation from her grand-nephew, who was leaning over her chair, watching the scene with considerable interest, in spite of his assumed nonchalance; "just as I used to look when I first went to Court, my dear. The dear good King, in fact, assured my dear lord, that—"

What George the Third had said confidentially

to his Lord-Chamberlain did not transpire; for, whilst the picturesque old lady was pausing to remember, the door again opened, and the loud voice of Dawkins announced "Captain Calverley, the Reverend Mr. O'Dogherty, and Mr. Dillon."

The greatest excitement immediately became visible in the little party. The young ladies looked at each other a telegram of tremendous importance. Jack Scudamore glanced at the Bishop, and Monseigneur gazed suggestively towards Captain Fitzmaurice, who had sprung forward to welcome his old comrade.

Then ensued a general hand-shaking, and a confusion of noisy exclamations quite as joyous, Dillon coming in for a liberal share. He threw himself at the feet of the Bishop as soon as he beheld that dignitary; and whether it was that he was elated with the blessing he then obtained, the kindly reception he met with, or the wine he had drunk before starting on his journey, certain it is that he told his story with double the vivacity he had infused into its first recital.

It was rather a singular fact, that the most interested of his audience was the very person who, in the morning, had so much difficulty in seeing how the deuce the rigmarole of a story could be connected with *him*. He was quite alive now to the connection, and shouted and laughed at every stage of those wonderful travels even more loudly than Captain Fitzmaurice.

Further explanations followed; when it appeared that the young officer received a telegram in India, apprising him of the discovery of the priest who had married his father and mother; that he had met Dillon in Calcutta; and that they had returned in the same steamer; the agent and the confessor having reserved that portion of the interesting narrative.

It now came out that those horrid papists, the Bishop of Melpotamos and honest Jack Scudamore, had been plotting, scheming, planning, in this awfully secret way, to insure the happiness of two Protestant orphans, who had, without the slightest fault of their own, been suddenly reduced

to the greatest social degradation from a position of affluence and dignity.

As I have already intimated, the Squire's wife had, on her deathbed, desired that her daughter should be educated as a Protestant; and so religiously had he fulfilled the promise he had then made, that he had taken the most jealous care that no Roman-Catholic influence should affect her. Moreover, when he had ascertained that her affectionate friend and playmate had been persuaded to seek consolation in the walls of a foreign convent, he had appealed to his old tutor for assistance, with what result the reader is already informed.

But I have not yet done with the *tableau vivant* I have just been arranging. It must be imagined that the serious are grouped together in animated gossip, and that two couples had paired-off in different directions.

Captain Calverley was aware that the critical moment of his life had arrived. If ever he had occasion for a display of diplomatic finesse, it was

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at this particular time. He knew that the complication was in so delicate a state of difficulty that he *must* produce his ultimatum.

He had drawn Geraldine aside. He had, of course, been talking to her in that impressive style common to handsome officers of crack regiments when they obtain a favourable opportunity for the display of peculiarly manly eloquence; but he knew very well that he must exercise a miraculous amount of caution. And very prudent he was.

The young lady, on her part, was singularly free from mundane troubles. This was evident in those dove-like eyes, softer and more tender in their expression than ever, and in that fresh radiant youthful face, looking as jubilant as a seraph bringing an unpolluted soul to heaven; a sense of happiness more exquisite than any enjoyment she could have known in a cloister. She was delighted to have the hero of her childish dreams, the idol of her girlish worship, again near her; to hear the voice that had so often thrilled her sensitive na-

ture, and look on the handsome features and noble figure that had for so many happy years of dreamy speculation been her *beau idéal*.

Her consciousness of pleasure in the present apparently was quite as much as she was able to appreciate at once. It left no room for the delightful past, of course; therefore it could not have included a future of any kind. She smiled, she laughed, her eyes glistened; in short, her heart seemed as light as a feather.

It was while in this enviable mood that her lover pointed to the other couple, who, to all appearance, were equally well pleased with each other and with all the world.

"Your brother has greatly improved," he said.

"Yes, dear Fitz has become quite nice-looking," was the unsuspecting reply; "and he's so full of spirits too. It's very long since I have seen him in such a lively humour."

"The Duchess seems greatly amused by him," he added in much the same tone. She was laughing heartily.

"I am glad to see darling Fanny so pleased ; and am delighted to see dear Fitz trying to please her. They were excellent friends once, you know ; that is, before her marriage with the Duke."

"Oh, ah. Yes. I remember," replied the Captain, as naturally as if the affair had escaped his recollection. "He rather liked her, didn't he?"

"Every one must like her," cried the faithful friend. "Fanny has the most lovable nature that ever existed."

"I think I'd better not advance further in that direction," said the cautious diplomatist to himself.

"Now, Fitz, as I believe that you have a good heart and a loyal nature, I will take you into my confidence."

This was said by the Duchess to Lord Fitzmaurice, as I shall now call him, about the same time the preceding little dialogue was going on.

The young soldier elevated his eyebrows, while pleased surprise gleamed in his gaze. He thought she was joking, but was quite willing to appreciate the pleasantry of the jest.

"Swear that you will keep my secret," she whispered.

"*I swear!*" murmured her companion with such intense emphasis, that it had quite a sepulchral effect.

"You see those young people yonder?" the Duchess inquired.

"Turtle-doves out of a cage!"

"Exactly. I intend them to enter the cage matrimonial."

"I thought they would have flown there of their own accord. I suppose there's seed in the box, and a bit of sugar between the bars."

"Now don't be nonsensical. It's a serious business."

"What, matrimony? Solemn fact, that."

"How provoking you are, Fitz!"

"But what am I expected to do, Duchess?"

"If you call me Duchess, I'll call you Fitz-Jones."

"Oh, you spiteful! But *n'importe*. Any thing for a quiet life. Enlighten me as to the difficulty."

"My darling Geraldine has got an odd idea in her pretty little head, that I ought to marry Captain Calverley."

"What an absurd child!"

"And she thinks that he would be very happy, and that I should be very happy, if I were to have him."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed the young officer, with exaggerated disinterestedness. "It wouldn't do at any price."

"Then you will help me in an alliance, offensive and defensive, to get those two joined inseparably in the bonds of holy wedlock?"

"I see. To be sure I will."

She gave him her hand, and it was warmly pressed.

In another corner were the Bishop, Father
VOL. III.

Mike, and Jack Scudamore; to all appearance so absorbed in an animated discussion, as to be totally unaware of what was going on at no very great distance from them. Their conversation, however, did not quite favour that conclusion.

"I think, Jack, every thing is proceeding as favourably as you could desire," observed the first.

"Not a doubt of it, Monseigneur," said the confessor. "Leave the young people to themselves; the comedy will come to as pretty an ending as we could wish."

"It's a race in the dark, Harry," replied the Squire. "One can't know which horse is winning."

"Don't seem to be watching them," interposed the prelate, "or they'll take the alarm."

"Well, as I was saying," Jack Scudamore began again in his natural key, "Bonnie Lass challenged, and presently the pack burst into full chorus, and then—"

But I need not take the reader further in that adventure.

I have another couple to dispose of. The dowager had found a listener in Dillon, and was intent on making the most of him. She had entirely forgotten his identity; indeed was under the impression that he was a stranger of distinction.

"Of course you remember his most gracious majesty, the dear good King, George the Third."

"Oh, yes, my lady!" was shouted; and added in a lower tone, "I never so much as set eyes on his blessed pigtail."

"Did you ever dance the Saraband?"

"Did I ever dance with Sarah Band, my lady? Faith, then, I might at a wake, or a pattern, if she was to the fore."

"The dear good King said I danced it admirably; and so did the sweet Queen and the charming Princesses; and my dear lord said that I danced it divinely."

"Oh, I belave it, my lady; ye'd dance it now, I daresay, iligantly." Then he muttered, "I'd like to see ye footing a jig, old girl. Bedad, ye'd cover the buckle now famously, wouldn't ye?"

While this relic of the old court is drawing upon her reminiscences, I will return to the first pair of lovers.

"Don't you think they make a handsome couple?" inquired Arthur, still directing Geraldine's attention to the very lively pair before them.

"Yes, Arthur," was the reply.

"I never knew two people so admirably suited to each other in every way," he added, quite as if without any *arrière pensée* whatever.

"Do you think so?" she exclaimed in a tone of surprise.

"How could I think otherwise? Fitz is so warm-hearted and joyous, besides being as brave a fellow as ever fought and bled for his country."

This eulogium on her brother was very agreeable to Geraldine. She smiled so bewitchingly that the cautious diplomatist was emboldened to proceed in the same course.

"I think the Squire would be delighted to bring it about," he added, still as coolly as if most rigidly impartial. "He's always been very fond of

Fitz, you know ; so I'm sure their marriage would make him very happy."

"He *is* very fond of dear Fitz ; and I daresay it might make him very happy to have him for a son-in-law."

"Nothing can be more certain. Then what a capital thing it would be for Fitz ! The Squire would be certain to make him his heir ; and with the Windermere-Court Estate in addition to his patrimonial property, he would support his peerage with perfect magnificence."

"Oh, would he ? What a good thing ! But—"

"He would be uncommonly happy with her, too."

"Oh, yes, Arthur. But—"

"And she would be extremely happy with him. She has scarcely been half-an-hour in his society, and see how supremely happy she looks."

"Yes, Arthur, I begin to think you are right. I haven't seen dear Fanny look so thoroughly gratified, I don't know when."

"Then it's a settled thing. Suppose we use

our best endeavours—secretly, you know—to bring it about.”

“Oh, I should be so glad to do any thing likely to insure the happiness of my darling Fanny !”

The *attaché* saw that the ultimatum must be produced at once.

“Yes, Geraldine,” he said with a particularly mournful voice and look ; “you are amiably ready to secure the happiness of your friend, of your brother, of your uncle—indeed I think I may add of the entire world—*except your faithful lover !*”

“O Arthur !”

“Your indifference to my fate has made me take a resolution to banish myself from your enchanting presence for ever.”

“O Arthur dear, don't say that.”

“Yes, Geraldine, I must seek occupation to divert my melancholy ; and court danger to find an honourable termination to my blighted hopes. I shall volunteer to join the force now about to embark for the war in China.”

“You must not say such horrid words, dear

Arthur. It is quite cruel of you to think of doing such a thing. If you would only wait—”

“For how long, dear Geraldine? You see the troops are ordered to embark next week.”

“O dear! you are very, very unkind. If you would only wait till—till dear Fanny is out of her mourning.”

It wanted a little more than a month to make up the year. The gallant Captain appeared to hesitate.

“Will you promise me then to become my wife?” he inquired, his heart beating a great deal too fast for that of a diplomatist engaged in arranging a difficult complication.

“Y-e-s, dear Arthur;” and she held out her hand. He pressed it to his lips with a fervour totally at variance with the studied indifference with which he had been carrying on the negotiation.

“Hullo!” cried Lord Fitzmaurice, after having stolen a glance at the lovers. “I don’t think our interposition will be necessary. Those

precious turtles are billing and cooing like old boots !”

“ What were they doing, Fitz ?” demanded the Duchess, eagerly.

“ I am afraid I shall make but a humble imitation of a sublime original ; but I’ll try.”

Thereupon he took the hand of his lovely companion, and kissed it with passionate devotion.

“ You provoking creature !” exclaimed the blushing Duchess, faintly attempting to withdraw her hand.

“ Yoicks ! Hark forward ! hark forward !” shouted Jack Scudamore, who had been furtively watching the scene.

“ Jack, you’ll spoil all !” cried the Bishop, forcibly laying hold of one of his arms.

“ My son, you must really be quiet,” added the confessor, seizing the other.

“ Oh, I forgot. Yes,” he went on with ostentatious loudness, “ we ran into our fox in glorious style,” &c. &c.

“ What’s that thick stick you have in your

hand?" inquired the dowager. "They did not carry such things at court in my time; my dear lord always bore a white wand. What's it for?"

"Is it this nate little bit of a twig, you mane, my lady?" replied Dillon, looking at a tremendous bludgeon. "What is it for? oh, it's just for dusting a jacket that wants it badly." Adding in a lower tone, "I've promised the priest I won't hurt a hair of the villain's head; but, bedad, if I catch him, his ugly hide will never forget the bating he'll get!"

Ah, these mental reservations so common among Catholics! Of course Dillon was a Jesuit in disguise.

Presently the two girls went to each other; and after a little whispering the Duchess kissed her friend very affectionately, and led her away; then the two gallant Captains hastened to each other, and spasmodically shook hands; lastly the three sly dreadful old papists came towards them with beaming faces and ejaculations of the most cordial congratulation.

At the end of dear Fanny's mourning, Geraldine's marriage with Arthur Calverley took place. A similar happy event came off on the same day, and the same hour, and at the same church. Captain the Viscount Fitzmaurice led to the hymeneal altar, as the communion-rails are somewhat heathenishly termed in the newspapers, Frances Duchess of Porchester.

On the first bride the Squire bestowed a portion of ten thousand pounds, which enabled the well-married Calverleys to reconcile themselves to the match. Respecting the other union, an arrangement was made between the high contracting parties that they should live with the Squire for the best part of the year, and that he should live with them at Maurice Court the remaining months.

I must not omit a remarkable fact. The two brides, having been duly married according to the Protestant form in their parish-church, chose to be married over again in the Roman-Catholic chapel; Monseigneur officiating, assisted by Father Michael. Whether it was merely feminine

caprice, or proceeded from a sense of gratitude and respect, I leave to the decision of the unprejudiced reader ; but it seemed to make the heretic couples extremely happy ; and it was difficult to say which of the three scheming, plotting, dreadfully-artful old papists it gratified most.

It is only necessary here to add that some little time after the events I have been recording, there was in England a grand papal promotion, in which the Bishop of Melpotamos was raised to the dignity of Cardinal, and the Rev. Michael O'Dogherty elevated to a bishopric. It is generally admitted by their co-religionists, who know these worthy men best, that they are among the most liberal and enlightened members of the Catholic hierarchy.

In due time both of my charming heroines gave hostages to Fortune—I should say, to their delighted husbands ; and the faithful friends almost immediately began to arrange the future of the young gentleman and young lady in long clothes ; and an uncommon pretty romance they anticipated.

Geraldine's daughter was of course a miniature Geraldine; but Fanny's son, whom both father and mother had insisted on naming after his grandfather, all his hunting-friends emphatically declared to be a pocket Jack Scudamore, to his unspeakable gratification and pride.

They made good wives and good mothers. Of course, how could such true womanly natures do otherwise? They were indeed as perfect in their domestic relations as a Divine Providence intended they should be; better women in real feminine virtues than the most rigid convent seclusion and religious discipline could have made them.

Geraldine won even the severe Bishop's widow to acknowledge that she was a model female Calverley. As for her beautiful cousin, the gentlemen of the Delamere Hunt were but of one opinion, and it was indorsed by the county. She was every thing they had expected her to be from their first acquaintance. But what of that? What else *could* she have been? Was she not JACK SCUDAMORE'S DAUGHTER?

CHAPTER XII.

POETICAL JUSTICE—WITH A VENGEANCE !

IN the mean time the parish of Delamere Parva had been going on quite as well as could be expected under the circumstances. A new Vicar had been appointed, and had at first performed the services to extremely thin benches. Some changes had been made in the decorations of the new church; the gaudy drapery about the altar had been superseded by the fair white linen cloth of the communion-table; the great cross above it had been taken away; and the little receptacles for holy water removed, with the lighted tapers that burnt around the picture of the Virgin and Child.

These alterations, however, were not deemed sufficient, no one being more discontented with

nevertheless he is obliged to conform to them. He is a prisoner for life, with worse than prison-discipline and prison fare.

Alas for the Rev. Basil Plynymmon ! he sees now—a good deal too late—that it might have been better for him had he edited his proposed new edition of *Æschylus*, or continued to grow prize china-asters, and take pupils. He is a memorable example of zeal without judgment.

Mr. Samuel Perkins did not remain long at Delamere Parva after the arrival of the new Vicar. Perhaps the Hon. and Rev. Adolphus expressed a wish to revive the defunct brotherhood of St. Hildebrand, which alarmed the lean Curate ; and, to secure the comfort of his poor legs, he resigned. He shortly after accepted a Welsh curacy in a mountain parish with an unpronounceable name, where, with a stipend totally out of proportion with the prodigality of its consonants, he married, and had a family that soon threatened to become as numerous as his congregation, the bulk of the population being Methodists.

The Bishop's nephew was equally zealous as his predecessor, but a good deal wiser in his generation. He cared very little for the High-Church movement; but as he found that he could not get his congregation together without it, he shortly appeared a greater Puseyite than Dr. Pusey himself. It was in vain that the churchwarden remonstrated; it was equally useless for his supporters to grumble: they found, unfortunate religious frogs as they were, that they had exchanged Vicar Log for Vicar Stork. The honourable and reverend's very High-Church connections seemed to make very High-Church principles matters of course; and in the schools, among the poor, or in the pulpit, he gathered about him a throng of fair enthusiasts, who not only furnished him with the latch-keys to their street-doors, but to their purses.

Prominent among his fair admirers was Lucretia Brabazon. Her weakness, in the shape of aristocratic predilections, led the brewer's heiress, strong-minded woman though she was, to feel an interest for the new pastor she had never felt for

the old ; and when he called upon her, ostensibly for her counsel rather than for her subscription, and talked confidentially to her of the great people with whom he had been in the habit of associating, he met with no difficulty in laying the foundation of a very friendly alliance.

By this time she had become tired of her classical freak ; her objects of natural history she had previously bestowed on the Delamere Museum ; her collection of statues she now sent as a donation to the Delamere Athenæum. She dressed in a prim little poke-bonnet and black cloak, and—marvellous change !—went about the village distributing tracts.

But the Honourable and Reverend Adolphus De Courcy excited her ambition to attempt a higher religious flight. Why should she not, she thought, be the founder of a sect ? There was Lady Huntingdon Connection,—why not Miss Brabazon's ? There were Muggletonians, Brownists, and followers of Joanna Southcote,—why not of Lucretia Brabazon ? There were Puseyites

in the Church of England,—why not Brabazonians?

It was upon this element in the capacity of the strong-minded woman, that the new Vicar skilfully experimentalised. He gave it a bias, and then a practical purpose. Soon afterwards, extensive alterations were made in Brabazon Lodge; and the religious community were startled by the intelligence that it had become a Protestant convent, of which Miss Brabazon was the lady superior, and the Honourable and Reverend Adolphus De Courcy the spiritual director.

Several of the fair enthusiasts had joined the sisterhood, and the establishment appeared to be going on with surprising success; “Mother Lucretia,” as she was styled, conducting herself with commendable propriety.

It chanced however one morning, when the nuns had returned from vespers, a lay sister, wearing the features of Patty Clark, entered with a face a great deal more secular in its expression than her dress.

"A visitor is at the grille, who demands to see the mother superior," she said.

"Is he a layman?" inquired Mother Lucretia. "If he is, send him away."

"He *is* a layman, my mother. He declares that his name is Potter,—General Potter, of the Nizam's Irregulars, I think he said; just arrived from India."

"Cousin Potter!" exclaimed the mother superior, clasping her hands together in a sudden transport of extremely mundane ecstasy.

Signs of the deepest excitement immediately became evident throughout the sisterhood.

"I *must* see him, my daughter. Conduct him to the *parlour* of the convent without a moment's delay."

The lay sister disappeared amidst evidences of commotion among the nuns. There was a general throwing-up of hands, and much casting-up of eyes; whether by way of appeal or protest, I cannot say.

"You should remember your vows, my mo-

ther," observed an elderly sister, bearing a strong resemblance to Miss Pincher of the Fashionable Finishing School for Young Ladies.

"So I do, my daughter," replied Mother Lucretia in the same grave tone. "I made a vow to cousin Potter, behind the great mash-tun in my father's brewery, when he was on the point of leaving England as a cadet, that I would be his wife whenever he should return from India a great general, and claim my hand."

Tremendous excitement became visible among the dark-robed recluses; with the younger ones especially.

"He *has* returned a great general," added the Mother Lucretia, with the look and gesture of a Siddons. "He has come to claim me as his wife."

The old nuns looked horror-struck.

"I dare not break that sacred vow. My daughters," she continued in a low but very emphatic tone, "you don't know cousin Potter. Were I to refuse him, he'd burn the house about your ears."

A general chorus of shrieks and exclamations of affright followed the mother superior's rapid step to the parlour.

Brabazon Lodge underwent a last transformation. The sisterhood had to find a new home; for in a month it became the residence of Mrs. General Potter and her husband. She excused herself to the Honourable and Reverend Adolphus De Courcey with the very natural plea, that circumstances over which she had no control had changed her vocation. The Bishop's nephew prudently made no objection, and married the lady with as little scruple as he would have previously received her confession.

Mrs. General Potter made by no means a bad wife. She was always a little eccentric; but became reconciled to the fact, that she was much better adapted to found a family than a sect.

Dillon returned to Ireland, reinstated in the agency, and with other solid proofs of the gratitude of those he had served so faithfully; but prosperous as his circumstances were, he could

not be induced to assume the appearance or position of a gentleman, as his friend and countryman Father Mike had suggested. His little bit of a twig did not come into operation, as the wearer of the jacket it was intended to dust had drunk himself into a fit of apoplexy before the avenger arrived at Maurice Court; and the pretender to the title had started for Australia as soon as he learnt that the fraud by which he had profited had been discovered, and that the police were on his track.

I have yet to dispose of another couple. They being the lowest in the author's estimation, have been the last thought of. But let justice be done, though the heavens fall. In this winding-up act I shall take special care that justice shall be done; and liability shall be most carefully estimated. The result, I hope, will be pronounced satisfactory, except to the sufferers.

The reader will be good enough to imagine a fir-wood, separated from cliffs overhanging the sea, on the south-western coast of England, by an irre-

gular slope of sand, dotted over with clumps of moss and other herbage, from which the surrounding soil has been blown away. The cliffs are high, but composed entirely of sand, in which the action of wind and rain has formed steep "chines," up which smugglers and preventive men have made paths from the beach below.

A path may be seen running through the shady wood, which leads in one direction to the high-road, in another to a little watering-place in considerable request for its mild climate and fine prawns. There are not many visitors at present, for the fir-wood, the favourite promenade, seems quite deserted. In the path to the road, and in the one to the half-dozen bathing-machines, and then to the village, not an individual is to be seen.

Nevertheless it is not entirely deserted. There is a clump of brushwood and tall ferns at one particular spot near the steepest part of the slope, where any one lying in the fern may command a view of the two paths, the ascent from the beach,

and the wide-spreading ocean, without being observed except by passing wood-pigeons.

It was here that two men had thrown themselves, apparently for rest after a long journey, for their clothes were covered with dust; moreover they bore evidence of having suffered from contact with brambles or other destructive obstructions, for they were unquestionably somewhat ragged.

It may easily be believed from this, that they were not of the class of persons who had their names inscribed as visitors to the neighbouring little watering-place in the *Prawnington Gazette*; indeed their appearance was so thoroughly disreputable, that the most sociably disposed of those rather unsocial people would have preferred walking on the other side of the way, had they seen them approaching. They had the unmistakable tramp appearance, mingled largely with the equally unmistakable scamp demeanour. A policeman, of ever so limited an experience, would have arrested them at sight. He would be sure

that they were quite unable to give a respectable account of themselves.

I shall not go into pre-Raphaelite details of their picturesque rascality. Let it suffice that their fragmentary wardrobe and close-cropped hair suggested a strong suspicion of their being jail-birds—tickets of no leave, hiding there for some unlawful purpose.

One, a man of tall sinewy frame, wearing around one ankle an iron ornament that appeared to have been recently filed, was resting a long black-tufted chin, belonging to a narrow cunning visage, on a pair of large bony hands, and his elbows on the sand, as he lay his length, glancing his blood-shot eyes now over the sea, now through the wood.

When I add that his companion was a short thick fellow of ebony complexion, the intelligent reader will at once recognise two subordinate characters in this story. They were convicts escaped from Portland.

Sambo was sitting concealed behind the trunk

of an old thorn, a few yards distant only from the line of tall firs that ended the wood on that side. He seemed to be greatly elated at his freedom, for he occasionally emitted his peculiar guttural laugh; but every now and then the greenish-white eyeballs shot a phosphoric glare as he glanced at the stern gloomy visage of his companion.

The latter did not look by any means in a laughing humour. Whether dissatisfied with his thoughts or his tobacco, I cannot say; but he was employed in reflection and mastication.

Sambo began to sing. He was not quite a Sims Reeves; but considering that the poor fellow had no voice and quite as little ear, his performance was creditable. He possessed the further recommendation of being a genuine Ethiopian serenader, not a sham.

“ I wish I was a brewer's 'oss,
But twelve months in de 'ear.”

It was intended to go to the tune of “Dixie's Land,” but was not very readily recognised as such.

"You know why I wish to be brewer's 'oss, massa?" he inquired.

The white man did not deign to give him an answer. Unabashed the other continued his song :

"I'd turn my 'ead where was my tail,
And drink up all de beer!"

"O golly, massa! dat prime, eh?"

He gobbled and chuckled in tremendous glee.

"Hold your row, you tarnation fool!" replied his superior. "I arn't in no humour for such catterwauling. I want to be out of this cussed old used-up country. I'm sick o' the Britishers. An almighty mean lot they are, that's a fact! A mosquito couldn't get blood out of 'em. Better be a dog under the stars and stripes."

"I no want to be dog in Merriky, massa. Like betterer to be free nigger among de Britishers. Spose you go, massa, and leave Sambo."

"That cock won't fight, I tell ye. I think

you knows what Hiram Whittler is when he's riled. He arn't then like to trouble hisself about the notions of such scum as niggers, I reckon."

Sambo's eyes flashed at the insult, but he made a sort of gobble by way of laugh, and approached the white man, apparently quite in a jocular mood.

"Well, well, massa, I go to Merriky when de Yankees come in de boat."

"I thought you'd come round without any of my moral suasion," said Mr. Whittler with a sneer.

"Oh, you so berry cute, massa."

Sambo had got pretty close behind his companion, and burst out into a long chuckle of intense negro enjoyment. Suddenly he made a spring and a quick forward movement. A hand that he had carried behind him was raised above his head, and descended upon the body of his prostrate associate.

With a yell of agony the latter sprung to his feet, as the negro, with a long knife dropping blood from up to the hilt, jumped back.

"Aha! I hear you tell Yankee captain you'd take me to New Orleans and sell me as slave," he cried, dancing like a furious maniac, his eyes glaring phosphorously at his victim. "Aha! what you tink of de nigger scum now?"

It was evident at a glance that the blow had struck home; the wounded man directed a hand towards a pocket in his ragged garments, but it fell powerless at his side; his eyes appeared to glaze, his head drooped, and he fell at the feet of his destroyer.

"Yankee captain no take Sambo just at present, eh, Massa Hiram? Spose he come, you go stead of nigger."

"Sambo," said the dying man, in so piteous a tone that it might almost have softened a stone. The negro left off his horrid exultation.

"Sambo, I ain't used you well, that's a fact; but I am anxious to make amends. I haven't many minutes to live; let me do you a service afore I die, my faithful comrade."

"What massa say?" inquired the black man

with evident interest, coming forward, and dropping the knife.

“I wish to tell you where I have buried a treasure that would make you rich for life, my poor darkie.”

“Eh, massa, what you say? *treasure?*”

The eyes of the negro flashed with avaricious excitement, and his whole demeanour exhibited the most intense eagerness. He drew still nearer.

“My breath is getting very faint; stoop, my poor Sambo.”

“Yes, massa; tell poor Sambo. Where is de treasure? Is it gold?”

“All gold,” he whispered,—“all gold; and I placed it—”

“What you say, massa? I no hear de words.”

“Bring your ear closer,” murmured the dying man more faintly.

“Yes, massa; where is de gold?”

“Closer, closer.”

The negro knelt down, and brought his ear as close as it possibly could be to the aperture whence

these directions had almost inaudibly emanated. Then followed a yell, or rather a series of yells, of the most frightful description. The dying man had pinned his murderer's arms to his side with his own, and wound his sinewy legs round his lower extremities; at the same moment he turned himself round with the body he had securely imprisoned, and began to roll down the slope.

While the prisoner was shrieking and struggling, a boy in a short smock-frock was seen to descend from one of the tallest fir-trees at the border of the wood, where he had climbed to rob a squirrel's nest, when the sudden appearance of the two ruffians forced him to remain. He descended to the ground, and turned round to take another look at the tragedy he had witnessed.

"Murder! murder! murder!" he shrieked out as he beheld the dead and the living man rolling over each other towards the cliff.

"Murder! murder!" he bawled, as he ran swiftly down the path to the village.

"Murder! murder!" he screamed out again

when the two policemen of the place caught him as he was running towards his mother's cottage.

"Scum o' the airth!" hissed the dying man between his teeth.

"Marcy, inassa! we are coming to de cliff!
O Gor A'mighty!"

The black man, his eyes starting out of their sockets, his visage livid with terror, found himself in an iron grasp, without the least power of checking the downward movement that was hurrying him to a frightful death. They began indeed to roll more rapidly as the impetus increased.

There was a horrid shriek, followed by a fiendish laugh, as the two policemen came rushing up out of breath just in time to see the bodies pass over the precipice.

Down the chine they now went, rolling over faster and faster, the girations increasing with terrible rapidity as they descended. The murderer continued to scream; the murdered neither spoke nor laughed; a demoniac grin was rigidly impressed upon his hateful visage as over and over

they turned, the living in a death-grasp, fixed as in a vice.

Over projections they bounded; then rushed again down precipitous declivities in the sand with frightful velocity; then sprung from point to point with the elasticity of a ball; and finally, with a prodigious leap, bounded high over a projection, and fell into the sea below.

It is supposed that the tide sucked their corpses entangled into the Channel; for after their plunge into the wave, not a vestige of either was ever seen again.

THE END.

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